



# CITIZEN OF TWO WORLDS

MAIN

*by Mohammad Ata-Ullah*

TOWELL THOMAS says in his *Introduction to this extraordinary autobiography*:

"In recent years, when my work has taken me round and round the globe, usually I have made it a point to stop off in Pakistan and spend a day, or an evening, with one of the most interesting men in Asia, or anywhere for that matter. . . . Mohammad Ata-Ullah, Pakistani doctor, mountaineer and philosopher, has lived a life of high adventure. . . .

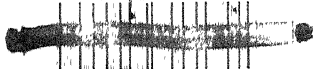
"I had long hoped he would write the story of his journey along what I call 'The Golden Road to Samarkand' . . . Now we have it; and what a spectacular, colorful, and lively autobiography it has turned out to be!

"But this is more than the exciting account of the experience of a man who has lived an unusual life. . . . For Mohammad Ata-Ullah is indeed a citizen of two worlds. Once again, here is evidence that Kipling wasn't so right when he said 'Never the twain shall meet.' For in Ata-Ullah, East and West have united in a way that augurs well for the years ahead. . . .

"In Chapter 4 you encounter a cobra in the water pitcher. And in the closing pages of this book you get the story of some of the most dramatic mountaineer

*(continued on back flap)*

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CITIZEN  
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*by*

*Mohammad Ata-Ullah*

*With a Foreword by*

*Lowell Thomas*

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CITIZEN OF TWO WORLDS

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To my parents, with this prayer:  
“My Lord, have mercy on them, even as  
they nourished me in my childhood.”  
THE QURĀN: Chapter 17, Verse 25



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## *Foreword by Lowell Thomas*

While camping, recently, in the tall redwoods of California, I encountered one of the men of the American mountaineering team that had tried to conquer K<sub>2</sub>, in the Western Himalayas. A message had just come from Harper's asking me to write this foreword for Colonel Ata-Ullah's autobiography. Since Bob Craig, of Aspen, Colorado, knows Ata-Ullah more intimately than I do, I asked him for a bit of help. To which he replied:

"Whenever I think of our many-talented Pakistani friend I see him again, high in the Karakoram. One party had just scaled a ridge at some twenty thousand feet, and for the first time on the expedition, the men of this group were looking north into Central Asia, the region beyond the Himalayas. Colonel Ata-Ullah rolled some of the snow from the north side of the ridge into a ball, tossed it back down the Pakistan side of the continental divide, and as he did so, he solemnly said, 'I herewith claim all territory north of this ridge in the name of my Pakistan!'

"Of course," added Bob Craig, "Ata-Ullah knew as well as we did that the regions to the north of us were all a part of Chinese and Russian Turkistan. But it was the Pakistan mountaineer's way of saying that surely no human being had ever looked out over that wild panorama before. So, why not claim it?" In the bitter cold, and the high wind that nearly blew them off that ridge in the Himalayas, the Colonel was, as always, in high spirits, trying to get his weary companions to laugh.

In recent years, when my work has taken me round and round

the globe, usually I have made it a point to stop off in Pakistan and spend a day, or an evening, with one of the most interesting men in Asia, or anywhere for that matter. Since World War II most of my jaunts across the world have been in connection with a so-called "High Adventure" series of motion pictures. Incidentally, I never did like that title, because to me all life is that. What could be higher adventure than the work of a doctor, curing ills, saving lives? Or a farmer, tilling the soil and seeing things grow; or a teacher, watching the minds of children develop; or a young man, wooing a maid? Surely every human activity is high adventure, unless you allow yourself to vegetate.

At any rate, the projects on which I had been working could, I suppose, be called high adventure in the traditional sense—that is, going places where few others have gone, and doing things that are rather seldom done. But there is high adventure of the mind as well as in the realm of the purely physical, and Mohammad Ata-Ullah, Pakistani doctor, mountaineer, and philosopher, has lived a life of high adventure in both.

I had long hoped he would write the story of his journey along what I call "The Golden Road to Samarkand." Every time I have stopped off in Karachi, or Lahore, to visit Ata-Ullah, I have urged him to do something about this. Now we have it; and what a spectacular, colorful, and lively autobiography it has turned out to be!

But this is more than the exciting account of the experiences of a man who has lived an unusual life. It is also an important document in this era of world-wide international tensions and racial and religious conflicts. For Mohammad Ata-Ullah is indeed a citizen of two worlds. Once again, here is evidence that Kipling wasn't so right when he said "Never the twain shall meet." For in Ata-Ullah, East and West have united in a way that augurs well for the years ahead.

In the far distant future, if we ever approach the millennium, I suppose we will have One World. But as one global traveler, so far I see few signs of One World on the horizon. At any rate, if it ever does come, surely we will be ruled by many Moham-

mad Ata-Ullahs. Meanwhile, I've only found one, and he's a Pakistani.

My picturesque friend from the Punjab, who has spent his life in many lands, was indeed fortunate in his choice for a father, a Punjabi graybeard who passed on to him much enlightenment concerning human experience, and at the same time briefed him concerning many mysteries of the universe from evolution to moral law.

In Chapter I you encounter a cobra in the water pitcher. And in the closing pages of this book you get the story of some of the most dramatic mountaineering exploits in all history. Mount Godwin-Austen—familiarily known as K<sub>2</sub>—along with Everest and Kanchenjunga is one of the world's loftiest. This dread giant of the Karakorams was first challenged by an Italian expedition led by the Duke of the Abruzzi. Following that failure, other expeditions, led by top American mountaineers, tackled K<sub>2</sub>. Ata-Ullah was assigned to several of these as the representative of Pakistan, assigned to assist Dr. Charles Houston, Bob Craig and their associates.

On one of these attempts to scale K<sub>2</sub>, a young friend of mine lost his life. He was Art Gilkey, with whom I had spent some time on an icefield in Alaska. Art, they think, was swept away by an avalanche, during the night. No one will ever know for sure. This is one of the many high adventure stories herein related by Colonel Ata-Ullah.

In this autobiography first we follow the adventures of a boy in The Land of the Five Rivers. Then we go with him as a medical student, in Lahore and in London. After some years as an officer in the Army of the British Raj, and after many adventures in Persia, Ata-Ullah takes us back to India for the rioting and bloodshed that came with the partition of Hindustan. Born a Mohammedan, he learned to treat Hindus and Christians as brothers. He understands and respects both his neighbors in India and the Westerners beyond the seas. Possessing the wisdom of the East, he practices with skill the medical science of the West. His has indeed been a journey along the high road to understanding, and he tells us with compas-

sion and intelligence of what he found along the way. The autobiography of Mohammad Ata-Ullah will, I believe, leave you with the feeling that you have made a fabulous journey in the company of a wise and witty Citizen of Two Worlds.

**CITIZEN  
OF  
TWO  
WORLDS**



## CHAPTER I

### *Father and the Cobra*

BECAUSE IT WAS the smallest room in the house, we used it as a bathroom. Its plumbing was simple. In one corner there was a drain hole, in another stood three earthenware water pitchers. These were filled morning and evening by a water carrier who brought the water from a nearby well in a large goatskin leather sack. He carried the dripping bundle on his back and handled it with adroit ease. He would bend a little, lift the lid of the pitcher with one hand, and with the other untie the string on the neck of the sack; then give his spine an expert wriggle, and a stream of sparkling water would flow unerringly to its mark along a graceful curve. The spectacle used to fascinate me, and I would listen eagerly for the rhythmic patter of the water carrier's barefooted walk.

It was a beautiful clear day, and as the water carrier entered the bathroom, I was at his heels. He filled the pitcher that was near the door, and then moved on to the next one. This lay tilted to one side; its lid had fallen off and was some distance away on the ground. He bent low and picked up the lid, then stretched his hand to straighten the pitcher. The next moment there was a loud yell of terror and the water carrier rushed out of the room. I followed him as fast as my legs would carry me.

"Cobra, cobra," he shouted.

"Where is it?" asked my father coming out of his room. He was followed closely by my mother, who immediately picked me up. The water carrier pointed toward the pitcher with a shaky hand. He was tongue-tied with fright.

Father looked carefully into the pitcher, and then with a quick movement he put the lid firmly on its mouth. "It is still there," he said as he started to carry the pitcher outside the house. "You stay here," he told us as he went past. And as mother stood in the open doorway, I watched the dramatic events that followed from the safety of her arms.

Our house was close to a brick kiln which father supervised as part of his duties. The kiln had wood-burning furnaces with large iron doors, and an attendant quickly opened one of these doors as father ran toward him shouting loudly.

This is one of my earliest childhood memories. I can clearly see father's short thickset figure silhouetted against the raging blaze of the cavelike mouth of the furnace, the red pitcher with its deadly burden in his hands. Half a dozen men ran toward him; he gave them some quick orders; they picked up logs and sticks from the nearby fuel stack and formed a circle around him.

Father raised the pitcher shoulder high and hurled it into the furnace.

The pitcher missed its mark, and hitting the side of the iron door broke into a hundred pieces. The snake fell out in a loose coil and for a moment lay still as if dead; then it raised its fanlike head in a quick glance to pick out its victim. Fortunately, someone dealt it a well-aimed blow and crippled it before it could move.

Father was a construction engineer who worked for the Indian railroads, mostly where new lines were to be opened. This often took him a thousand miles or more away from our ancestral family home in the Punjab, the Land of Five Rivers. His salary was modest, but enough for a happy though simple life. It was a nomadic job. Father's colleagues invariably left their wives and children at home, but he took us along wherever he went. Depending on his work, we would stay in a place a few weeks or a few months and then move on. The moves often



came at awkward moments, without regard for sun or cold or wind or rain. But memory recalls no discomforts, and there was nothing but joy in that life. The shivering cold of the raw nights is forgotten; the loving warmth of mother's bed as I nestled close to her and mocked at my own chattering teeth is vividly remembered.

We lived in tents or huts or rented houses; and now and again we spent nights in the open under the stars. Father's work lay sometimes in a forest, sometimes in a desert; now on the banks of a river, now on the shores of a lake. We traveled as best we could. There were journeys by railway trains, and bullock carts and camels and donkeys, and horse-drawn carriages, and ferry boats. On occasions—all too few occasions—there were rides on elephant back. This went on for the first fourteen years of my life, while home was also school, and both home and school were always on the move.

We lived close to nature and I had a ringside seat at many of her spectacular shows. There were the howling sand storms which arose without warning and raged for days. As in a house besieged, we would close all doors and windows. But this was no protection against the fine gritty sand which seemed able to penetrate the walls, making straight for the pores of our skin and our eyes and ears. After the storms were over, days of bathing and washing were needed to ease the emery-paper feel of our bodies.

Then there were the yearly monsoon rains, which changed the face of the earth overnight, turning sandy beds into raging torrents. One day everything would be dry and parched and still; the next all would be green and heavy and fresh. Life would teem all around; croaking frogs and clinging leeches would appear from nowhere. From near and far there would come to us stories of floods and death and destruction; and once we were marooned ourselves for ten anxious days. Sometimes there were grand and fearful thunderstorms, and twice

I saw lightning strike within yards of where I lay. In these and in her other moods, nature was already familiar to me even as I first began to notice things.

I also saw more of nature's wilder creatures than would have been possible in the sheltered life of well-inhabited places. At the age of six, I had a close brush with a wolf just outside the house, when the foolish beast preferred quantity to quality, and took one of our sheep for his dinner, though he could easily have taken me. A year later, I had dozed off on a cool patch of grass on a sultry evening, and was awakened by a sniffing panther, whose whiskers were nearly touching my face. And in the armed safety of father's company there were exciting encounters with river crocodiles and other animals of the jungle.

The only animal that ever harmed me was a leopard cub trapped by some of father's men. Everyone was so captivated by its helpless charm that we decided to keep it as a pet. I monopolized the lovely creature, and it learned to follow me wherever I went. Soon it was chasing mother's chickens in the back yard with joyful antics and with such perfect grace that I became its willing accomplice and a thrilled spectator. It foiled all father's efforts to discipline it, and was eventually chained up. I fed it well and tried to make it happy in every way, but the disgrace of that chain must have gnawed into its freedom-loving soul, for it became fretful and ill. Even so, it remained my friend, and I would often stand near it, and let it paw my feet, or lick my outstretched hand. One day it was in a deeply affectionate mood, for it passed its tongue across the back of my hand with more than usual vigor. Before I could pull my hand away much of the skin had been peeled off, leaving a raw bleeding surface behind. This became septic and for weeks I carried my arm in a sling. The friendly leopard cub I never saw again.

But I got another companion soon, when my next younger brother, Karamat, was born. His arrival was a day of confusion.

I was bewildered at suddenly finding myself neglected: hitherto I had been the center of attention. "God has sent you a playmate," said father, as he took me to see the newcomer. I saw him with mixed feelings: part curiosity, part anger at the suggestion that I should play with this helpless creature; but quickly I was caught up in the excited comings and goings and feastings of the household. Over the next year, Karamat was sometimes a rival, sometimes a toy; but once he had learned to walk and to speak a little, I was generally glad of his company.

Now that we were two, arrival at a new place became even more exciting than before. Karamat and I would slip away quietly from camp or house and make a joint survey of the possibilities of the neighborhood. Were other youngsters around? Did they speak our language? (For India is a country of many languages, and father's moves were sometimes over long distances.) What were the local rules for playing marbles? Where could we lay out our hide-and-seek game? Where have our football field?

These first romps often ended unexpectedly, as happened once after a period of heavy rains. Our new house was like an island in a large sheet of water; and as we explored around it Karamat brought along a crude wooden boat that our carpenter had made for him. It had no sail, but its bobbing up and down in the ripples was beautiful. As it drifted here and there, we screamed with delight, and splashed and paddled after it. And then, all of a sudden, everything disappeared from sight.

That of course was my prejudiced view of events, for actually I was doing the disappearing myself. I had fallen into a deep pit.

Three days later, I awoke in my mother's lap, still weak and exhausted. I was relieved to find that I was not to be punished; instead father would soon teach me how to swim.

With some empty grocery tins tied together as a life belt, he took me to the pit where I almost drowned. In a week I was

swimming, though real progress came only later, when we found ourselves on an irrigation canal which was the favorite resort of urchins from a nearby village. Now I saw other styles and was bitten by the spirit of competition. I was specially thrilled by two of these lads, who dived headlong from a bridge and every now and again caught a fish with their bare hands. I begged and cajoled them to teach me their methods, and when more by chance than by skill I caught a fish myself, I could not sleep all night from excitement.

Learning anything from father was a pleasure. He noticed my shoe laces getting tangled into knots that would not undo easily. So he showed me a reliable way, and made the learning of it so intriguing that for days I worried him to teach me other knots. From things like swimming, and the tying of knots, and the proper use of nails and hammers, he went on in the same spirit of fun to teach me the alphabet and simple sums. I never noticed the difference, and found this equally enjoyable. Only much later when I went to school did I make the discovery that formal education is painfully dull.

Our days started early, with morning prayers led by father. Then as mother prepared breakfast, father taught me the day's lessons beginning with the Qurān. All around was bustle and activity, with cackles from the hens and bellows from the cows that we always kept. The servants added their own noises as they went about feeding and milking them. Occasionally, if I was stuck at some difficult place, father would order a two-minute break. I would then run for some quick swallows of milk, perhaps straight from a cow's udder, kneeling near it with my mouth wide open as the friendly milkman sent a warm and delicious spray frothing right down my throat.

Because of father's methods, the noise around us never distracted me. I learned to concentrate on the work in hand and to ignore everything else. He made me work actively, standing by to give brief hints and to help out only as a last resort. If I

got into a blind alley, he insisted that I find my own way out. If I came across a difficult word, he would not tell me its meaning until I had floundered all over the dictionary. He explained how to multiply by repeated addition, and refused to give me printed tables. The tables from which I learned multiplication were my own laborious discovery.

What happened after the breakfast lesson varied a great deal, though every day had its fixed landmarks in the five daily prayers of a Muslim household: one at waking in the morning, one before going to bed and three in between. The prayers were so brief as not to be irksome, and with the example of my parents before me, these simple prayers early became a part of the pattern of my life, like night and day, food and sleep, work and rest.

When father went out for his work, I usually stayed at home, studying fitfully under mother's indulgent supervision. But sometimes I spent the day outdoors with father, dividing my time between snatches at my books, peeping through his theodolite or watching him at work with his men. Now and again there were disputes among his staff, or a foreman wanted a bad worker dismissed. I loved such incidents, for father's approach to problems of human relationship was fascinating and effective. He had a basic thesis: that everyone had far more of good in him than of bad. To think otherwise was to deny the benevolence of God. To break with a person was to fail to awaken his dormant good qualities. But along with his all-pervading humanity, father was a firm disciplinarian who expected and got work of a high standard.

The last meal of the day was taken early, and although we would not sleep for another hour or more, there were no formal evening lessons. Mother and father would be tired, and our lights were not bright enough to read by. We would stretch out on our beds and our talk would flit from topic to topic. One moment I would be orally revising my lessons; the next mother would be telling a fairy tale, or the story of an ancient prophet.

Father would go from astronomy to history to science to religion to poetry; and he would make everything so alive that I would resist rather than welcome sleep.

These evenings were pure joy, and often there were things that sent me into uproarious laughter. On special occasions I begged mother for a story about the wise man with the onion head, who was always solving impenetrable mysteries for his royal master, the emperor of an isolated island. Typical was Onionhead's behavior when the first-ever elephant came to court as a present from a distant land. "What is this creature, Onionhead?" asked the baffled emperor. Onionhead made a careful examination. Turning toward the emperor he uttered a loud cynical laugh, and then burst into tears. "Why did you laugh?" asked the emperor. "At your Majesty's ignorance," answered Onionhead. "Then why the tears?" "Because, your Majesty, not even I know what this creature is."

Onionhead could see two sides to everything. In every situation he saw simultaneous reason for laughter and for tears.

Father remembered by heart much Urdu and Persian poetry, and every now and again mother would ask him to repeat some particular poem. Many of these were by Ahmad of Qadian, from whom mother and father had derived abiding inspiration. One I remember vividly because of its prophetic nature. It begins beautifully with a simple and moving passage in praise of God's greatness, and then goes on to lament mankind's shortsighted preoccupation with material things. This would surely attract divine wrath in the form of destructive world-wide wars and revolutions, in which "even the Czar of Russia would be overwhelmed by tragedy."

I did not have a course of study fixed for each year, nor were there any examinations. As soon as I mastered the work of one grade in any subject, I was given the books of the next grade. Nor was I made to divide my day into a rigid or a regular pattern. If I felt interested in a particular book, I could go on with

it as long as I wanted. Only once did father refuse me this indulgence. Searching through his book cases I found a heavy thousand-page volume with exciting drawings of impossible-looking creatures. It was written in difficult language, but with the help of a dictionary I could read about a page an hour. It was absorbing reading, thrilling beyond belief, and I plunged into it immediately. All other work was put aside and I lost interest in meals and play. The treasure that had fallen into my hands was a complete, unabridged copy of *The Arabian Nights*.

Four absorbing days were filled with nothing but the talk of fairy princesses and the thrill and terror of daydreams about frightful genii and fire-breathing dragons. By the fifth morning father's patience was exhausted. "How much have you read by now?" he asked. "Quite a lot," I replied, uneasy in the guilty knowledge that I had gone beyond limits. Father refused to let me shelter behind vagueness, and insisted that I work out with pencil and paper the time it would take me at that speed to finish the whole book. In due course, I read out the answer sheepishly without looking up. I cannot recall it; but it was over a year.

I was relieved to hear that the book would not be taken away. But my access to it was rationed to one hour a day, subject to good behavior. Perhaps father subsequently relented. Maybe an hour with *The Arabian Nights* is not the same as an hour at sums of compound interest. Even my speed of reading may have improved with practice. I finished the book in two months.

Inevitably my scholastic progress was lopsided, as I would find out during visits with my grandparents, made every year or so to join a wedding or some other family gathering. I was a favorite with my grandmother, and I loved the special flat bread for which she was renowned in the family. It had a filling of onions, shredded radishes and spiced herbs, between two thin layers of whole-wheat dough, fried in clarified butter to a crackly crisp brown. The best Italian pizza would make a poor

showing beside grandmother's radish bread, washed down with her special brand of creamy churned yoghurt.

There would be a dozen gracious aunts and uncles to spoil me, and it was fun to play with cousins of my own age and to show off about our travels. But when one of them asked, "What class are you in?" my reply was always something like this: "In the first form in geography, in the fourth in arithmetic, in the fifth in science." This led to many complications when at the age of fourteen I was reluctantly sent to a boarding school at Qadian, because the proper teaching of science subjects required a laboratory, and we could not afford one at home.

Father went to leave me at school, and for two days we were guests of a housemaster who was one of father's friends. For all of the second day I was in a melancholy mood. Eventually it was time for father to leave. He said words of encouragement in farewell and got into the horse cart that was to take him back. Through my tear-laden eyes I looked up at him. He was smiling. Suddenly the dull anguish in my heart became a sharp stab of loneliness and terror, the like of which I had never felt before. I was paralyzed. The next moment father stepped down from the cart and clasped me to his side. Both of us burst into tears.



## CHAPTER II

### *Mother's Death*

OUR HOME was a happy, self-sufficient place in which mother and father led busy and versatile lives. Much of our furniture was homemade, as were most of our clothes; and not content with sewing them, mother sometimes even spun her own yarn. We were never long enough in one place to raise grain, but we tried to grow our own vegetables, and we usually produced abundant quantities of milk, butter, poultry and eggs. The nearest doctor could be a day or a week's journey away, so against accidents and illnesses we kept medicines and medical books at home to which mother and father turned for guidance for ourselves and our neighbors. Once a poor woman in obstructed childbirth was saved from death by these amateur doctors, with the help of directions read out from a book kept open on the bed at the appropriate page. When I nearly drowned, or when Karamat drank a whole bottle of a poisonous syrup sufficient to kill twenty adults, or when my third brother, Zia, suffered from acute pneumonia, we were treated at home by our parents, for there were no professional doctors within reach.

For amateur needs our medical library was extensive, but sometimes this was a nuisance rather than a help. The language of the books was often vague; the same set of symptoms could be ten different diseases with varying or even opposite cures. Many times I would sit by as mother and father argued about a case, consulting book after book, only increasing their confusion in the process.

One dusty evening I returned from an excursion to a nearby

village with painful bloodshot eyes. Father made a careful examination, consulted two or three books, compared my condition with some of the illustrations, said a devout prayer and put some drops into my eyes. The next morning before I sat down to the daily lessons from the Qurān, he examined my eyes again.

"They are quite clear," he said. "How is the pain?"

"All gone," I said happily.

"Good. Then you can read your day's lesson."

He handed me the holy book, and I took it joyfully. But the next moment I was struck dumb with fright. The page was one large blur.

"I can't read, father," I said. "I have gone blind."

The best eye hospital in the area was in Calcutta, and in less than an hour our stunned household was on the way. Two days later the eye surgeon diagnosed the trouble at once. The drops father had put in my eyes contained atropine, and my near vision had been harmlessly paralyzed. In a week I would read again.

But the fates were not so kind when one of these amateur doctors herself fell ill. Mother sickened when we were in a remote forest camp where father was erecting a steel bridge for a new railroad. Her illness began vaguely, and at first it was believed to be merely the effect of an unusually hot summer on her frail body. Once or twice drugs from the household cupboard gave hopeful relief, but it proved temporary. She fought the disease bravely and persisted with her chores, but eventually she had to take to bed. The nearest doctor was called in, and he rode out to see her every few days, but when her condition steadily grew worse, we left our camp and moved to the town where the doctor lived.

I was old enough to sense father's anxiety. He still joined us in our pranks but there was not the usual spontaneity in his laughs. He would ask us to say special prayers for mother's recovery, and in his own prayers there was greater earnestness

and humility. Once I woke up with thirst late at night and found him on his prayer rug racked with anguish and pain. "O my kind Lord," I heard him sob, "great and grievous are my sins. I avow my transgressions, be pleased to forgive them; for none but You can grant forgiveness." I was surprised, for in my childish mind I was certain that I knew all about father, and I knew that he had never committed any sin. I sat down quietly by his side to say a little prayer of my own, but he remained oblivious of me. God must have been an immediate personal experience to him at the moment, so obviously did that prayer come from the depths of his being.

The next morning I waited until I was alone with mother, and then I shared my secret with her. "I think father saw God last night," I told her. She made me sit down on her bed, and pressed me close to her heart. "Of course," she replied, "and so will you see God, if you are good like your father."

Mother continued to get worse in spite of our prayers and the best efforts of the doctors. Father nursed her day and night without sparing himself until he became constantly restless, tired and half-ill. Then one morning I got up to find him calm and at ease. "The three of you are going over to your grandmother's for a few days," he said. "The train leaves in an hour, but if you get ready quickly we can buy some toys on the way to the station." When we were ready, father took us to mother's room. "This is her first real rest after a long time," he warned us, "and we must not wake her up. Come, kiss her gently on the forehead, but don't remove the bedsheet from her face." I followed father on tiptoe, and bade a whispered farewell in mother's ear. Karamat was equally gentle and careful. But Zia, barely three years old, lost his self-control, and forgetful of the promised toys made a dash to climb onto her bed with tears in his eyes. "Quiet," I admonished him. "Let mother sleep peacefully." The admonition was unnecessary, for mother's present rest was too sound ever to be disturbed by Zia again. Father

picked up Zia in his arms, and, with his eyes now misty with suppressed tears, he quickly led us out of the room.

At the toy shop father did something for the first time that he was to repeat again and again. He gave me five rupees, and when the toys I bought were being wrapped up, he gave me some more money. "What is that for?" I asked. "That is for the toys that your mother might have bought you if she had been here," he replied. Till the end of his days he would unexpectedly do something affectionate for me, and without his saying a word, I would immediately know that he was doing it on behalf of mother.

Time has shrouded my own memories of mother in a gentle mist, but for years after her death, her saintly qualities were the talk of our village. That I should receive her love in full measure was natural; I was her first born, and a son, and had arrived after seven childless years of marriage had gone by. But over the years I have heard much from many others to show that the circle of her affection and kindness was very wide. There are moving stories of her selfless good deeds, many of which have brought me a rich harvest of good turns in later years. Man cannot inherit more from a mother than I have done.

After mother's death, father married again, but the choice he made was a blessed one, for I never received anything but generous and warm-hearted treatment at the hands of my step-mother. That she should wholly fill mother's place was neither natural nor possible, and she did not attempt it. In due course, she had children of her own, and father was a devoted husband to her as long as he lived. But neither for herself, nor for her children, did she set up any pressures on father's affections to make it difficult for him to be both a father and mother to me. At the time it seemed simple, but in later years I have often wondered at the spiritual power by which father brought about this happy state of affairs.

Father's spiritual influence was not confined to his family, and

I saw other lives changed out of recognition under his spell. He was the first one from his village with some Western education, and his material rewards had been good. His job, humble though it was, was the height of affluence by the poverty-ridden standards of our Indian village. Many of the Indians of his youth were setting out like him to better their material lot by a study of English and a knowledge of Western sciences and skills. The edifice of science in those days had a perfection and a captivating beauty that left neither room nor need for religion. The great industrial achievements of Western nations, and the crushing prestige of British rule had made most Indians apologetic and ashamed of their own religion and culture. But that was not the case with father. Under the influence of Western thought, unlike many of his contemporaries, he had not lost his soul. He had found it all the more surely, and he helped many others to do the same.

I was the interested listener to many discussions between father and his friends. I heard one of them lay bare his tormented soul when he found his faith in God slipping under the impact of a Western author. Another, fired with patriotic zeal, argued that the salvation of Eastern people lay in a materialist philosophy of life. I heard the analysis from many angles of some age-old questions: freedom of human will versus determinism, the paradox of God creating pain and evil, the evidence for and against divine revelation, the efficacy of prayer, the possibility of miracles. And the constant background of these talks was the relation between science and religion.

Father's knowledge of science was practical rather than profound, his interest in metaphysics and philosophy broad rather than detailed. But his quick and clear mind could follow with ease even the abstruse and intricate arguments of his intellectual friends. His religion was a guide for conduct rather than a recital of dogma. He had adopted it for a simple reason, direct personal experience. Through religion he had found a richness

and meaning in life that he knew was not attainable in any other way.

To father's way of thinking there was no conflict between science and religion. There could not be. Religion was the word of God; science a knowledge of His deeds. The two fields were separate, but at the points of contact each illuminated the other, each gave the other more depth. Any apparent conflict was man made, the result of ignorance or of perversity.

Many of these conflicts between science and religion, which worried others, were resolved by father, happily, simply, intelligently. On reading in the Qurān about Adam and Eve, I asked, "How long ago did they live?" "The Qurān mentions no date," replied father, "but according to the Bible, a few thousand years ago." Sometime afterward there was a newspaper story about the "missing link," and father explained about Darwin and the evidence of man's existence for a million years. "Then the Bible is not right," I said. "Why not?" he answered. "It all depends on where in the continuous process of evolution you draw your arbitrary frontier between the human and the sub-human. Define man by his erect gait and the opposed thumb, and Darwin is right. But the Bible defines man by his moral conscience, and puts the dividing line where the concept of good and evil arose for the first time. This was more truly the Rise of Man, for this was something unique. Compared to this, the entire process of evolution had produced nothing new since the amoeba."

"It is generally called the Fall of Man," I interjected.

"That is a pity," he replied. "It is like criticizing the first infant stumble of the future Olympic runner. Man is not sinful by nature, as shown by the inborn honesty of a child in arms. Even in hunger he rejects the breast of anyone but his mother."

But there were other conflicts to which father had no easy solutions. He did not ignore or play them down, and admitted their disturbing implications. But these were over a narrow

field; a minor challenge but no threat to his faith. He would readily grant the importance of intellectual skepticism in man's progress, and would then add: "But in any worth-while sense man cannot fulfill himself through doubt; he can do that only through faith. Faith alone can produce action, which is the supreme justification of life; doubt can only paralyze."

The core of his religion was belief in the One God, Beneficent and Merciful, who had planted in man the seeds of unfathomed material and spiritual growth. And He had made all provision to the end that the seeds might grow fruitfully. The tiny drop lodged in the womb is sustained through a thousand stages of helplessness, until years later it is a learned scientist probing into the mysteries of outer space. An equal grace sustains our spiritual needs. Knowledge of God's existence and of basic moral principles is to our souls what the air we breathe is to our bodies; and the basic moral principles are no more our creation than the air. These have been given to mankind, stage by stage, by a succession of prophets, whose teachings have grown in scope as man's needs have grown in complexity. Islam was not a new religion, and Mohammad's mission was not to contradict Buddha and Krishna and Confucius and Moses and Jesus, but to bring their teachings up to date. All of them were worthy of reverence as equally the bearers of a divine revelation.

Father's approach to religion was intelligent and rational and yet deeply mystical. He could become impatient if a fellow Muslim read into the Qurān that man had been created a few thousand years ago, but he listened to atheists and agnostics, and followers of any philosophy or faith moved by a spirit of inquiry, with sympathy and patience. He never indulged in argument for argument's sake, he had no desire to score mere debating points. So, when in the youthful arrogance of my first contacts with Western thought and science, I announced to him the doubts and troubles of my own soul, he conceded me the right to my own views. He used no parental authority, he as-

served no superior wisdom, for he knew that it had to be my own struggle. That struggle was long and lonely, and in some ways it is not ended yet. There were years of uncertainty, but, by the time of early manhood, father had helped me to rediscover my faith, through his sympathy, prayers, patience and logic; and above all by the example of his life in action.



## CHAPTER III

### *My Loss of Faith*

THE PROCESS of losing my religious faith was not only easy, but exhilarating. It began as soon as I arrived at college. This was at the university town of Lahore, the capital city of our home province of the Punjab. Father at the time was working five hundred miles away in the Sind Desert, but our ancestral home was close by: two hours' train journey, followed by a pleasant ten miles on horseback through a green countryside.

College was a new world of heady intellectual adventure. It was a world for which I was ill prepared. Compared to my fellow students I was at once ignorant and learned, wise and yet a fool. In years of travel I had seen more of the world than anyone else in my class, but I had never left home. I was a voracious reader, in the habit of plunging into every book that fell into my hands, but I had seen only books that had been thought worth buying by my parents. I had been encouraged to think for myself, and to argue logically, but my practice in these arts had been confined to the small circle of a happy family where there was more agreement than argument.

I was now fifteen, and I faced college with confidence, happily unaware how much I was still a child. One of the first things I did was to invest in a camera and a complete developing and enlarging outfit. The onset of cold weather three months later found a knowledgeable photographer shivering in his summer clothes. I had spent the money meant for winter clothes on my hobby. I had neither bathed nor changed my underwear, and on a weekend visit with her, one of my aunts pointed out to me in

confidence that I was crawling with lice.

The college to which I went was run by a Muslim foundation; though our British principal was a Christian, our professor of biology a Hindu and the students belonged to many creeds and faiths. Religious study was compulsory, but our tall lean teacher of theology pooh-poohed all science, and few of the students took him seriously. A complete contrast was our professor of English literature, affectionately known from his initials as Professor Mag. Professor Mag radiated the conviction that if there was any purpose behind the creation of the universe, it could only be the study of Shakespeare; and during Mag's class I was inclined to agree.

But the really scintillating personality on the college staff was our professor of chemistry, whose academic learning was acknowledged to be profound by everyone qualified to judge. Only the year before he had returned from Germany with a doctorate in philosophy earned by original research. To his academic prestige, he added charm of manner, natural courtesy, correct attire, graceful carriage and a youthful physique. He had read widely, and in his conversation there was the right combination of humor and seriousness. He was well versed not only in modern sciences, but also in Western arts and philosophy.

When I was placed in his tutorial group, I considered it my good fortune, since this meant enjoyable opportunities for social contact with him. I found his informal talk even more interesting than his classroom lectures, and he did not monopolize the conversation. On the contrary, with understanding and encouragement, and a ban on sarcasm and ridicule, he persuaded every student to speak his mind. It was stimulating company. Unsuspected horizons of knowledge began to open out in every direction.

Equally stimulating was my sudden access to an abundance of books, many on fascinating new subjects of which I now became aware for the first time. As soon as anything excited my

curiosity, I felt a compulsion to read everything about it on which I could lay my hands. In the meantime, work on the subjects of my examinations would be put aside. One thing would lead to another, and often before an immediate curiosity was satisfied, I would tumble on a more exciting side issue and find myself breathlessly rushing off at a tangent on an entirely new chase.

This was nearly my undoing, for I had chosen a career that needed single-minded attention. I was to become a doctor. This was not a reasoned choice; the conscious motive that I recall was to keep company with a school friend who would study medicine. An unconscious influence must have been the childhood memory of the helpless and deep concern of my parents with the illness that was around them. I was making up for their inadequacy. Father had left the choice to me, and he gave me his blessings when I wrote and told him of it. In approval he quoted this saying of the Holy Prophet: "Seek knowledge, even if it takes you to China. And the noblest of studies are the study of medicine, and the study of religions."

I enjoyed my medical studies, but I was unable to stay in the one groove. I could not keep away from philosophy, history, law, economics, astronomy and ten other subjects. I freely borrowed the other textbooks from fellow students, and I tried their patience further by treating them as unpaid teachers when I did not understand something. My examination results were usually mediocre, though I could have done just as well in half a dozen other subjects.

My simultaneous interest in so many subjects had one happy result: it gave me a wide circle of tolerant friends. I have sought many of them again and again in later life, and they have kept me up to date in their many fields. Bashir Ahmad, destined to become a leading figure in the Lahore bar, and later a justice of our High Court, provided first glimpses of the wonderful legal system introduced into India by the British. Ghani, a connois-

seur of good food, introduced me to exotic dishes unknown in my simple parental household. From middle age onward, this has not been an unmixed blessing, but I can always thank him for teaching me that most absorbing of all games: chess. Niazi introduced me to good Eastern music; he was already accomplished enough to be making commercial gramophone records. Qavi, brought up in the heart of Lahore, taught me intelligent familiarity with its narrow lanes and crowded bazaars.

In due course, college closed down for the first long vacation. It had been great fun, but I was also happy to be going home. I was bursting with much semidigested knowledge, and I looked forward to unloading it on father; though there was also the guilty feeling that I had neglected my formal studies. Father knew of this from college reports, and on the journey home I kept pondering suitable alibis. But I got no chance to use them, since father never raised the matter directly.

He picked up the threads of our friendship as if there had been no interlude at college. It seemed natural at the time, but looking back on it, I can see that this was the beginning of a wonderful new relationship between us. He listened to my newly acquired knowledge, he encouraged me to unburden my doubts about religion, he let me talk at length of the glories of Western arts and culture and he heard me out patiently on how the British could be thrown out of India. He would give his own views, we would have a free and vigorous discussion, but, if I disagreed with his reasoning and stuck to a point, he would leave me with it. "I think you are wrong," he would say, "but you are mature enough, and when you feel you are right, you must stand by your own judgment and reap or rue the consequences like a man."

A few days before I was to return to college, we spent a day together on the banks of the Indus River, where father helped me to shoot my first crocodile. I was pleased and excited, and father's happiness was greater than if he had shot the beast him-

self. He shook me by the hand, he patted me on the back and he praised my marksmanship. There was a long wait while the carcass was skinned; so father and I stretched ourselves out for some rest on the clean sand in a nearby palm grove. And now ensued the following conversation, which remains fresh in memory, though I cannot recall the stages that led to it.

FATHER: I am glad you are getting the chance of a college education. That is something I missed. And I am happy at your wide interests, but you must do better in future at your own examinations.

I: Yes, father, I admit that I have let too many things distract me, but I will resist that from now on.

FATHER: It is not that I do not want you to have a full life, but for your own peace of mind, you must put first things first. The tragedy of our times is that so few of us are clear about what we should worship.

I: That cannot apply to me, father. I am clear that God alone is worthy of worship.

FATHER: I pray that you will feel the same way ten years hence. So far you have not been tested by the full lure of the other gods that are fashionable these days.

I: I would rather have said that godlessness is the modern fashion.

FATHER: That is only a superficial view. The Qurān says—and experience confirms it—that every man must seek some object of worship; each person is driven to do so by an inner urge to fulfill himself. Talk for ten minutes to the devotees of such modern cults as Science, Art and Nationalism, and you will see that their fervor has the intensity of worship. These are the fashionable gods of today; the irony is that these are even less worthy of worship than the sun and the moon. At least the heavenly bodies are not man's own creation.

I: I do not understand this, father. Are you not deeply interested in science?

FATHER: Yes, I am; it is a powerful tool for achieving material ends. But if you once let science capture your soul, then this is what will happen. You will begin to demand proof of everything by the scientific method. Does God exist? Does life have a purpose? Do good and evil have a meaning? Science, unable to give an answer, will take the lofty attitude of an open mind. But make no mistake, on such questions the insistent realities of life deny us the luxury of an open mind. If you do not answer these questions with a yes, you will, in fact, have answered them with a no.

I: Do you then mean that reason has no place in the religious field?

FATHER: Of course not. On the contrary, only in the worship of God can man's reason have full play. Under the sovereignty of God there is room for the study of science, for appreciation of beauty, for service to your country. This fullness of life is not possible if you worship something else. To the really consistent scientist things like beauty and love are meaningless. At the high altar of art, every human virtue, except one, is of no consequence. And you know the creed of the modern nationalist: my country, right or wrong. Choose any of these worships and see what becomes of life. At best it becomes lopsided and narrow, and in the ultimate logic of science the whole universe becomes a pathetic illusion.

I: But what do I do about the spontaneous questionings of my mind? In a general way I believe in God, and in moral principles, but I also have an urge to analyze these beliefs critically.

FATHER: By all means do that. Think for yourself and study what the great philosophers have to say about moral problems. Their work has great merit as mental gymnastics, their metaphysical hairsplitting is superb; but their exercises never uncover a single moral truth which some humble prophet has not already given us in terms of greater simplicity and beauty

ages before. In the last few centuries man has produced revolutionary concepts in every field, except the moral field. If the source of the Ten Commandments had been the human intellect and not divine inspiration, they would surely have needed equally revolutionary change.

I: In other words, you prefer to derive morals from faith rather than from reason.

FATHER: It is not a matter of preference; only I cannot run away from the historical fact that everything in the moral field that humanity has found acceptable has come to us from religion. Nothing in my faith is in conflict with my reason, but there are matters of profound significance where reason is beyond its depth, and where all I can do is to adopt some working hypothesis. Religion is the working hypothesis that makes life more meaningful than any philosophy that I know.

Our conversation was interrupted here when someone came and said that the crocodile had been skinned. The sun had just set, and through the outstretched leafy fingers of the tall palm trees shone the dull red of the westward horizon. "Let us to our evening prayers," said father, as he stood up and faced toward Mecca. The rest of us formed a line behind him.

My stay at the university was a period of much inner turmoil. During the months spent at college, I was among the moderns; typical of my heroes was Bertrand Russell, whose writings had an intellectual compulsion that I found irresistible. But three or four times each year I went home for periods of varying length, and each time I succumbed to the equally irresistible spell of my father. Every move between home and college was also a transition between religion and agnosticism.

Not that religion was absent from the college environment. On the contrary, possibly the commonest topic of our student discussions was the hope of an Islamic renaissance in the twentieth century of which we would be the torchbearers. This long-

ing of the Indian Muslims was finding powerful contemporary expression in stirring verse by the philosopher-poet Iqbal. Each year for an annual ceremony on the campus, Iqbal would write a fifteen- or twenty-page poem which would be eagerly awaited by us. Many, like me, would then be unable to rest until we had committed Iqbal's latest work to memory. We would discuss it endlessly, reading into each line profound philosophical significance, and finding subtle meanings that could hardly have been in the poet's own thoughts.

But the Islam in college was different from the Islam at home. The college brand was militant, concerned primarily with material and political values, full of hatred for the West for its conquest of Muslim countries; and yet envious of the worldly wealth and prosperity of the Western nations. I recall one classmate who was venomous in his abuse of the British, but who was also the most assiduous amongst us in adopting British social and cultural habits. He longed for the re-establishment of a Muslim empire from Morocco to China, but he openly ridiculed orthodox Islam as suitable only for the primitive desert society of the Prophet and his companions. He had no use for such concepts as prayers and fasting, though he talked with pride of the military conquests of the caliphs and Muslim emperors. His Islam was much like modern nationalism.

At home there was neither any hatred of the Englishman, nor any desire to dress, drink, smoke and dance like him. Father also wanted a Muslim empire, but he wanted it in the hearts of men, and for the good of mankind itself; not for the glory of the group to which he belonged by accident of birth. He hoped that the course of human progress would eliminate all wars, and then there would be no ruling and no subject races; but, in the meantime, why call the British conquest of India bad, and the Moghul conquest of India glorious? His concern was with spiritual values, and it must have been this that made his behavior toward Englishmen different from that of most other



Indians of my acquaintance. Most of us found it difficult to forget the racial difference completely, and were arrogant or servile, depending on expediency or temperament. Father was the soul of courtesy to British and Indian alike, but he acknowledged no sovereignty except that of Allah, the King of Kings. With high and low, with British and Indian, he was always at ease; and in those of either race whom he got to know well, he usually produced a deep interest in the study of religion.

As the years went by, I found myself drifting the way of my fellow students. My respect and affection for father remained undiminished, but he began to look out of date. I became more and more concerned with the indignity of British rule, with the ignorance, poverty and decay of my countrymen. These things had to be put right; we did not have to be an inferior class of human beings. To attain the greatness of the Western nations all we had to do was to make ourselves like them.

This mood was powerfully reinforced by a phrase, the true source of which I learned only much later, and which I first heard from my anti-British classmate. "Religion is the opium of the masses," he announced, and he went on to assert that the progress of the Western nations was in direct proportion to their emancipation from religion. He was not unique; other friends and acquaintances all around were actively and boastfully emancipating themselves and finding it an exhilarating experience.

In the aftermath of World War I, politics was supplanting the older faiths of many of my fellow students. Gandhi was emerging as the great new apostle, and his ideas of civil disobedience and boycott of British goods and institutions quickly captured public imagination. Mass demonstrations became frequent, ending sometimes in lawlessness and violent disorder. There was a prolonged strike at my own college; and one of my close friends prematurely gave up his studies to become an active political worker. But following father's guidance I kept away from the

more hectic doings and took no part in the strike.

A landmark of Indian political developments was the incident of Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar, thirty-five miles from Lahore. A packed political meeting refused to obey a British general and disperse. General Dyer, not content with merely enforcing his orders, decided to teach the agitators a lesson. Bringing in army machine gunners, he mowed down the unarmed crowd. The country was stunned. Father was shocked. Strong disapproval was expressed by many Englishmen. Excitement amongst Lahore students reached fever heat, and remained at a high pitch for a long time. But apart from such occasions, I was not emotionally overwhelmed by political happenings. Even then I must have retained some detachment. Someone convinced me in a moving speech that our poverty, disease, ignorance were all due to foreign rule. I woke up in the middle of the night in a sweat over the thought that independent Afghanistan was in many ways worse than us. But Jallianwala Bagh had made me politically conscious, and thereafter I was unhappy about British rule. I wanted it to end, though I had no illusions that we would then enter a millennium.

After two years of premedical study at the Islamia College, I moved about a mile and entered the King Edward Medical College. The senior members of the faculty were mostly British Army doctors of the Indian Medical Service. Outstanding among them was Colonel Sutherland, the professor of internal medicine. He had already become a legend, and remains so to this day to the medical profession in the Punjab.

Of medium height and build, he was always dressed with immaculate professional dignity. Rumor had it that his suits were from Savile Row, and his shirts from Paris. The sound of his firm, elastic step was well recognized, and on hearing it we would instinctively stand still as he passed. He spoke in measured tones, never wasting a word or a gesture. A superb teacher both in the classroom and in the wards, he was an artist in illustrating

what he said, by apt and witty examples and skillful drawings on paper or blackboard. He would have made a name for himself in Hollywood, either as a script writer or in the field of animated cartoons. He was the ultimate in punctuality; in my two years with him I never saw him a minute late or a minute early. In class he always wrote in capital letters more legible than print; his ordinary writing with a thick quill pen was beautiful and illegible like Chinese calligraphy. His professional standing was of the highest both in England and in India.

I remember him most for the sympathy and kindness hidden behind his stern exterior; and for his high standards of medical ethics. Like other senior members of the faculty he could have had a big practice amongst the rajahs, the nabobs and the landlords. Instead, he saw only two selected private patients a day; the others had to go to his juniors. Under a self-imposed rule he took no fees from doctors, teachers, priests; their dependents and near relations; students and those in straitened circumstances. His anxiety was not how to make money, but how to refuse it without embarrassing his patients.

During the first Christmas of my medical studies father passed through Lahore, and stopped for a night. We were sitting alone after an early dinner when he suggested that I should get married. I was grown up and would otherwise be subjected to powerful temptations. He had in mind my stepmother's younger sister; this would better the existing good relations within the family. Three months later the marriage took place.

Almost from the beginning the marriage went on the rocks, though it was not until some years after I had finished my studies that it foundered completely. Many times we tried to live together, the longest being for a whole term in my fourth year. But it did not work. Eventually my wife asked for a divorce and I agreed.

This is an episode on which I look back with a feeling of shame and guilt; which I am always anxious to keep out of my

thoughts. Perhaps my best alibi is to blame it on incompatible temperaments, though in all probability the fault was more mine than hers. The failure of our marriage made a tragic mess of her life without seriously affecting mine. My stepmother never showed her feelings either by word or deed. For my own peace of mind, I made occasional attempts to discuss things with father, sometimes justifying myself, sometimes being apologetic. "We must pray for guidance" is all he would say at the end, without setting up himself as a judge of who was to blame.

Though not so much as in my childhood days, I still traveled a great deal. Because of father, I could get a free rail pass to anywhere in India. I visited him whenever possible, but now and again I broke new ground. One such trip was my first visit to the mountains. Till then I had not been out of the vast level plains of the Indus and Ganges basins, which stretch for nearly a thousand miles to the south and west from our ancestral village to the Indian Ocean. Only fifty miles to the north and east of our village lay the mighty Himalayan Range; but seen through the dusty haze which always hung over the well-plowed fields, the Himalayas had never impressed me. They were lower than the elm trees which grew in our back yard.

I also ignored the Himalayas for a better reason: our village possessed a more impressive circular monument of its own. This lay only half a mile away, and provided a welcome contrast to the infinite stretch of the level plains. It was a colossal affair which dominated the entire landscape, and towered to an altitude of a hundred feet. It was a derelict brick kiln.

And then, when I was rising eighteen, and was certain that the world had nothing new to show me, came my first journey into the mountains. I traveled by train to Baluchistan to spend a short vacation with some friends. The high mountains were to be reached about midnight, but I had little thought for them beyond a mild curiosity. I was excitedly looking forward to meeting the friends in Quetta, which was my destination and

which we would reach soon after breakfast. I like traveling by rail, and I always sleep soundly in a train. I wanted a good night's rest in preparation for the hectic days ahead, and so I went to bed early.

I cannot recall what time it was when I woke up with a feeling of being choked. The inside of the carriage was full of acrid smoke. The pitch darkness outside was of a quality of which I had no previous experience. It was solid, oppressive, heavy. The whole train was in acute physical distress. The locomotive sounded as if about to burst. In a flash I had shed the nightmare and was wide awake; but almost immediately the train had pulled out of the tunnel, and the smoke and the darkness had gone. I was looking at mountains from close quarters.

In a long and varied life, I can remember few other occasions when two successive instants of time provided such great contrast, both to my physical senses and to my deepest emotions. Bathed in the crystal light of a bright full moon, and stretching to the farthest horizon, was a fairy landscape of enchanting beauty. The mountains were nimble-footed, graceful creations of solid silver, which exultantly soared skyward, and were shaking hands with the stars. The sweeping shadows, of a dark purple hue, grotesque and varied in outline, were pregnant with divine mysteries. A single handsome cloud floated serenely above, like an angel on outstretched wings. A few moments of incredulous astonishment were followed by hours of deep pleasure, and I spent the rest of that night under a spell. Ever since then the nearness of mountains takes me irresistibly back to that night of blessed memory.

Many of the vivid memories of those days are of my medical studies. In the first weeks of dissecting a human corpse, no amount of soap could remove the sickly cadaverous smell from my consciousness. When I first got a minor role in an abdominal operation and the surgeon brought out a large part of the patient's intestines, I could not still my shaking knees. But I

kept steady hands by repeating to myself that what I did or did not do would make no difference. The first intravenous injection I gave was a German arsenic preparation to an advanced case of venereal disease. The first operation I did on my own was to amputate a finger crushed in an accident. Death by itself I did not find upsetting; though I was upset if much agony preceded it. My first visit to the mental hospital horrified me, and I usually played truant during subsequent classes in that place. My first reaction to infectious diseases was varied. I was pleasantly surprised with the cheerfulness of sufferers from tuberculosis. My first contact with typhus was a shock that I still remember.

The patient was in a special isolation room and before entering it I asked the nurse in charge for a clean gown such as must be worn by everyone approaching an infectious case. "A gown is not enough," she warned. "You must wear protective clothing from head to foot. And when you come out, you must hand in that clothing at once to the sterilization room, and yourself take a thorough shower. Contact with typhus is particularly dangerous, and the most rigid precautions have been ordered."

Suitably attired I turned the door knob, and entered the sick-room softly on tiptoe. As the patient had developed painful sensitiveness to light, the lamps had been shaded and the room was only dimly lit. Disease and death were not novel to me, and I knew from the nurse that this patient was in a distressing condition. But as I got used to the lowered lights and took in the details with my own eyes, I was dumbfounded with horror.

The sick man lay on his back with his gaze wildly fixed on the ceiling, his features twisted and contorted in an agony of the utmost terror. A bloodstained ooze trickled out of his nostrils and ran down over his cheeks, drying into ugly patches. His restless arms worked aimlessly as he picked and pulled at the bedclothes, and again and again he raised his hands laboriously in front of his face in a desperate effort to hide from the phantom sights created by his own fevered and tortured imagination.

Oblivious of his surroundings, he muttered and mumbled in an agonized delirium. His teeth were dry, his gums swollen, his tongue cracked and disfigured with a dirty layer of fur, except where the pus-covered flesh showed in the depths of the fissures. The cleanliness of the room seemed a strange background to a clinging foul smell which later on I learned to associate with serious cases of typhus.

I had now to examine the sick man closely, and I could not suppress a shudder of fear. I knew from the case sheet that the fever had affected many different organs of his body, but what most held my attention was a grim disturbance of his blood circulation. The virus had damaged his blood vessels, which had developed many leaks through which his blood was slowly seeping out into the surrounding tissues. As the blood leaked under the skin it clotted into ugly purple blotches which were spread all over the body. From various signs and symptoms I could see that similar and more serious leaks were taking place in the internal organs. Slowly and steadily the patient was bleeding into himself, and all the resources of medical science were powerless in the face of that inexorable process.

But the most dramatic experience of my medical studies was not of grim disease or sudden death. It concerned birth, and was doubly memorable because it occurred, not in Lahore, but two thousand miles away in Madras.

One of the requirements of the medical curriculum was that each student must assist at twenty childbirths. Only a few of us could do that in Lahore, where custom objected to male students during confinements. It was not so in Madras, and I was sent there with five fellow students for a month's work in practical midwifery.

My first morning at the Madras Women's Hospital was spent in the operating theater, watching the distinguished Brahmin surgeon-educationalist Ramaswamy Mudaliar. He did one or two complicated cases. Then there was an operation of childish

simplicity and momentous consequence: a Caesarian section. There was hardly any blood, it took almost no time and an unceremonious yell shattered the hushed silence. The tense faces in the theater broke into broad smiles at the sight of the bonny eight-pound girl. Only a minute earlier she had been hidden in the womb. I noticed her limpid brown eyes, and marveled at the quickness of her adjustment from a world measured in inches to a world measured in light-years. Since then, no one can impress me by producing a rabbit out of a hat. I feel insulted and not amused. I know that reality is stranger than magic.



## CHAPTER IV

### *Europe*

IN THE SUMMER of 1928, about fifty raw youths qualified as doctors from the university at Lahore and were let loose on an unsuspecting public with license to heal, hurt or kill. I was one of them. Most of them settled down without delay to earning a living, but father offered to spare me the need of doing so immediately. This is what he wrote in reply to the telegram about my examination result: "God be praised. This would have much pleased your mother had she been alive. I know that she would have wanted you to go to Europe for postgraduate studies. She always said that among her children you were the most scholarly. I believe the two best places are London and Edinburgh, and you should go to one or the other."

I read this with eyes dimmed with tears of gratitude. My expenses in Europe would take half of father's income, and I knew how meager were the family savings. I thought of the seven younger brothers and sisters, two of whom had not even started school. This made me uneasy, but any qualms were momentary and soon gave way to proud excitement. To study in Europe was the highest ambition of every Indian. Those who did so became a class apart in the social hierarchy. Thus alone could an Indian become eligible for the prize careers in the services and the professions which were mostly reserved for British youth.

A fortnight's voyage across the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean brought me to Marseilles. I was seasick for the first three days, but the rest of the journey was very

pleasant. The ship was full of French families in lighthearted holiday mood, homeward bound from Indo-China. I had my first glimpse of another continent: Africa. I marveled at the modern engineering wonder of the Suez Canal, and gaped open-mouthed at the ancient engineering wonder of the pyramids. Unobtrusively but eagerly I learned Western etiquette and manners from fellow passengers. All through the voyage I was in a mood of excited anticipation.

From books, magazines, the cinema and friends who had been there, I knew something of the grandeur of Europe, but the reality was more dazzling than anything that I had imagined. As I walked down the gangway of the ocean liner, I thought myself miraculously transported into the golden age of mankind. The next day I was in Paris, seeing with open-eyed wonder the revels of the multitude; their unending joys and pleasures. Taking place here each night were colorful scenes of pomp and splendor before which the courts of the greatest kings of history would have paled into insignificance. What I saw in the daytime were not shops; they were treasure houses. What people here took for granted would be undreamed-of luxury in my country. This undoubtedly was heaven on earth; this was the way to live, compared to which life in India was worthless drudgery.

A week later I found the magic of London equally overpowering, and made even sweeter by my knowledge of English. I enrolled at London's famous eye hospital, popularly known as Moorfields, for a course leading to the Diploma in Ophthalmic Medicine and Surgery. Diseases of the eye were very common in India, but this specialty was not much in favor with British doctors who went there. They generally chose internal medicine or surgery. The course in eyes was not too difficult, and left me time to study at some of the other wonderful medical institutions for which London is so justly renowned. Particularly valuable for my later professional career was a course in public health, and another in tropical diseases, though

this also produced a gnawing inferiority complex. An average Indian village had more cases of malaria and dysentery than the entire British Isles, yet these and other tropical diseases were taught and studied in London with infinitely greater skill and thoroughness.

By a fortunate accident I found temporary accommodation with a soft-spoken, kindly, middle-aged widow, named Mrs. Forty, who lived in a neat, split-level, three-bedroom house. Mrs. Forty shared one room with her only child, an attractive young daughter, who worked at a permanent-waving establishment in the fashionable Bond Street. Another room had been occupied for many years by the Honorable Major Ommaney, a tall, erect military figure with an impressive golden-gray mustache. My entry into the Forty household was conditional on both sides. The place was too far from Moorfields for my liking, and Mrs. Forty was not sure whether the major would approve of me.

The major had a modest private income and a small service pension. He lived a life of complete leisure. We kept very different hours and saw each other only during the weekends. The major normally woke up at midday, spent his afternoons in social visits and his evenings at his West End club. He usually returned to his room in the early hours of the morning. Over the weekends his mood varied. He might talk freely, and tell me of his World War I experiences, of his wonderful army days or of the departed glories of the British upper classes. Or, he might ignore me in a fit of brooding silence. These I soon discovered were the aftermath of his bouts of heavy drinking. He never objected to my presence.

Mrs. Forty was a very human person. She accompanied me one day to see what was then a novelty in London: a talkie moving picture called *The Singing Fool*. "I hope you enjoyed it?" I asked as we came out. "Immensely," she replied. "I cried from beginning to end." From the very first day she made me

so completely at home that I lost consciousness of the commercial nature of our relationship. Soon it was unthinkable that I should move elsewhere.

Some of the Indians in London were already known to me, and I enjoyed meeting them, particularly for the two annual religious festivals at the London Mosque, when we ate Indian food and wore Indian dress. Even more enjoyable were my new contacts with many Britishers. Shelley, a lean, aging, gray-haired music teacher, initiated me into the pleasures of Western music. He listened carefully to my few records of Indian music and made helpful suggestions to carry me over the hurdles of unfamiliarity. In a week I was enjoying "The Blue Danube"; in a month I had reached Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. I soon lost sight of Shelley, but he had shown me the road. A few months later, I was attending a series of concerts conducted by Sir Henry Wood, giving up my lunch to buy cheap standing-room tickets. My cherished collection of records gradually came to include Beethoven and even some Wagner. But over the years, Bach and Mozart have remained my favorites.

Horsefall similarly introduced me to the world of painting. He was a struggling middle-aged artist, whose long, unkempt hair, untidy, unconventional dress and changing, obscure, but provocative philosophy of life alternately attracted and repelled me. I would visit his large cluttered studio in Chelsea and now and again he took me around the great picture galleries. Suddenly, one day, he decided that he must paint my portrait, and capture "the unique old gold" of my complexion. I enjoyed the compliment in the full knowledge that this was only the aberration of a friendly imagination. I sat for him in a loose Roman robe, and he did a three-quarter profile. To me, the old gold seemed as insipid on canvas as in my mirror, but the painter considered his time well spent. Unfortunately, the portrait came to an inglorious end. At the time of my return to India, it was hopelessly damaged between Mrs. Forty's house and the

ship's cabin. Reluctantly, I buried it at sea.

Then there was Fuelling, the only son of a prosperous fruit merchant of Ealing. Somewhat younger than I, he had a handsome, chubby, freckled face, but a deformed left ear of which he was excessively self-conscious. I found him wonderful company, and greatly enjoyed the infectious spontaneity of his booming laugh. Today, thirty years later, nourished by a few subsequent visits to England, his friendship still continues to be pleasant, and I look forward to our fitful exchange of letters. These are full of silly puns, childish frivolity and ill-concealed plagiarisms. He stung me once with a devastating satire on the medical profession, which I quickly traced to Bernard Shaw's *Doctor's Dilemma*. This led to my reading almost all of Shaw's plays and prefaces. I retaliated by proving the impossibility of all motion, bodily lifting Zeno's Paradoxes from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. This launched Fuelling on a study of Greek philosophy.

Under the impact of the European scene the teachings of my father about religion had lost all meaning. How could I quarrel with the witness of my own eyes? I could see how sweet were the fruits of emancipation from religion. I was cowed, humbled, bewitched. Without much struggle I surrendered to my new surroundings, making the best of my opportunities within my limited means. The long shadow of European science stretching across the oceans to my college had started me on the process of losing my religious faith. Now that process reached its culmination.

Soon I began to have new ideas about my future. I found many Indians settled permanently in England and doing well. I felt confident that I could do as well or better, and I was able to prove this to myself when a lucky chance came my way. An Indian doctor with a well-established practice in a suburban neighborhood had to go away for some weeks, and he engaged me to look after his work. I was paid well and I made new con-

tacts with a cross section of the local population on the privileged terms of physician and patient. The more I looked at people and things around me, the more I thought that Europe should be my future home.

I began by writing all this to father with a deliberate casualness. He ignored the subject and made no comments. Then I raised the question insistently and more openly. He replied, in simple words, without anger or vehemence. At first his attitude irritated me; it made me uneasy and I put away his letter. But I could not keep it out of my mind, and soon I found myself reading it again and again with new effect. Every time that I read it now it seemed to squeeze my heart and produce a lump of emotion in my throat. Perhaps I was in a state of reaction from the first spell of European magic; perhaps the truths of that letter struck some inner chords of dim awareness. I may have been homesick, for I even had a dream in which father read the letter to me. In its influence on my life that letter was like a switch at the junction of railroad tracks, which was moved at the right moment and which settled the destination of a thundering locomotive for the rest of its journey. This was the letter.

I have a colleague whose son went to Europe six years ago and is still there. I believe he is doing well. If you are thinking likewise, you must feel free to choose in your own interests, though your place in the family circle will be hard to fill. Are you after material pleasures? They will soon satiate and disillusion you. Do you want an escape from the burdens of a citizen in a backward country? To some that is reason enough for turning their backs upon their homeland; to others that would be a call and a challenge from which they could never run away.

Are you reluctant to sacrifice earthly gain for spiritual worth, in the mistaken view that there is a conflict between living for this life and living for the life hereafter? But the fact is that you cannot live fully for either without living fully for both; and through God's mercy it is easier to have the best of both worlds than the

best of one or the other. You cannot choose between the two, just as you cannot choose between a healthy mind and a healthy body.

Our moral fiber is like our physical muscle; without exertion and effort both become flabby and decayed. So, beware the path of least resistance. But whether it is to be India or Europe must be your own decision, and may God help you to choose right.

Before long I knew that if I wanted to live at peace with myself it would have to be India. Gradually, as the novelty wore off, I also had second thoughts about Europe being a heaven on earth. Its material wealth had not produced contentment and happiness, only an insatiable longing for more; it had not led to brotherliness between man and man, only to a fratricidal struggle for existence; not to a noble self-fulfillment, only to a paltry self-satisfaction; not to a search for greatness, only to a desire for escape. The advance in worldly knowledge should have made life more fruitful, but just as the fruit seemed most ripe, it often turned into ashes; much that should have been a blessing often became a curse.

I said all this to Fuelling, Horsefall, Ommaney and other British friends, only to find that their own disillusionment with material prosperity was even greater. There was a tragic quality in the agitated restlessness of their own minds which began to frighten me, and which finally quenched my burning desire to copy them. I had looked for satisfaction in Western beliefs, but my Western friends seemed no longer to find their own beliefs satisfying. I sensed the torment in their souls, and recalled the contrasting peace of father's presence with nostalgic longing. I had held it cheap from easy familiarity; now I knew it as the most precious thing I could have.

Of course there was much in Europe that was great and good and clean. I must take that home with me. On return I must rediscover what I had learned from father and forgotten. I must put together the best from the East and the West, pool the

total heritage of the human race, live at once for the here and the hereafter, worship the true God and not the false ones. At least I could try. That it would be a rewarding effort was clear from the rich and blessed example of father's life. He became once more a shining beacon that would keep me on course in times of darkness, that would give me confidence through moral storms.

I completed my postgraduate studies in eighteen months, but, as in Lahore, so in London, with mediocre results. It was a great day when I returned to India. Our ship docked at Bombay, and as I walked down the gangway, I found father waiting to give me a warm welcome. For the next thirty hours we traveled together across the subcontinent by train in a two-berth compartment. Father was in lighthearted, happy mood throughout. I had some initial moments of embarrassed self-consciousness, but before long our relations were once more on the old intimate footing.

Along our route were some very poor and densely populated parts of India. I saw thousands in dirty rags and bare feet, the ravages of malaria and other diseases plainly visible in their sallow pigmented skins and listless faces. The contrast with the still-fresh memory of European prosperity made me uneasy. I had forgotten the extent of general starvation and chronic illness in my country. "I must do something to alleviate this suffering," I said to myself once or twice, awed and worried at the magnitude of the task. But that was not my predominant mood. There have been occasions in later life when I have felt a powerful sense of dedication, but just then I was content to be back home, eager to enjoy the privileges confidently expected by every young Indian returning with a European education.



## CHAPTER V

### *Army Life in Lahore*

A FEW MONTHS after my return home, I joined the British Indian Army, and received an impressive parchment commission signed by King George V. Written in beautiful calligraphy, it began with this arresting phrase: "To our loyal and well beloved subject, Mohammad Ata-Ullah, GREETINGS." It went on to define my authority and duties as an officer of the "Indian Medical Service." The I.M.S. was a coveted career, still mostly the preserve of British doctors, with only a few vacancies given to Indians. The salary was good, there were long paid vacations, and many privileges and perquisites.

It was not entirely a military career; the best civilian practices and the key positions in medical research and university teaching hospitals all over the country were also a monopoly of the I.M.S. It had traditions, it had prestige. From its ranks had come physicians of international repute: the personal doctors of successive viceroys and of famous Indians including Gandhi himself. It was the magic key to many doors: of serving the sick and poor, of advancing the cause of science and learning, of easy indolence and social glamour, of exciting sport and thrilling adventure. It could be any or all of these things, depending on your temperament and on how you handled your opportunities. It had attracted doctors from Britain, Ireland, Australia, Canada. They had nobly carried the White Man's burden, but we Indians were now anxious to make that burden our own.

A commission in the I.M.S. was hard to get even after a European education. Without it, you were not worth even an

interview by the selection board. I was one of a group of about fifty equally-well-qualified Indian applicants. The selection board had a hard time making up their minds, but eventually they did the sensible thing. They approved me and eight others. Immediately, my fee for feeling a sick man's pulse increased six-fold. I could no longer accept less without losing caste, though I could occasionally forgo it when I felt magnanimous. I had not only got a job, I had acquired aristocratic rank.

My first assignment was to a hospital in Lahore Cantonment, an exclusive British residential and military suburb close to the capital city. Lahore Cantonment was a key outpost of the empire, a beautiful garden town with wide tree-lined avenues. Here I was given a comfortable house standing in its own spacious lawns, with liveried servants to wait upon me. It was a house beyond the dreams of most of my countrymen. There were perhaps ten or twelve other Indians besides me who lived in the cantonment in equal affluence, and shared ruling class privileges with the hundreds of British officers who were the real residents of the place. It was a comfortable existence, satisfying to my ego, but with some elements of unreality that I could not quite ignore.

This unreality was noticeable in the relations between the British and the Indian officers. During the long period of British rule, a vast number of Indians had been recruited into the British Indian Army, but they had been barred from officer rank. This restriction was relaxed after World War I, grudgingly. A hand-picked few were then given the opportunity to show that Indians were good officer material. They must prove their mettle in peace and war, before wholesale "Indianization" of the army could be considered a justifiable risk. Caution was necessary not in the British interest, but in the interest of the hundreds of thousands of Indians from the rank of private to sergeant. Their morale in peace and their lives in war were at stake. The logical conclusion of this argument was obvious. Let a few

Indians reach generals' ranks; let another war test them; until then there must only be token Indianization. Unfortunately for Indian aspirations this could mean waiting for two generations, or more.

The tests of war would have been easy for the Indians who were given the King's Commission, as was shown when thousands were commissioned in World War II. Many were then honored for brave and distinguished service on the field of battle. But the tests of peace were complex and elusive, and through some peculiar quirk of human nature, both British and Indian often concentrated on the trivial rather than the essential. Professional efficiency was not forgotten, but it became more important to understand the nuances and graces that distinguished the British officer from ordinary mortals.

That is how it became necessary for some of us to learn our mother tongue anew. To speak Urdu the British way needed assiduous practice; the numerous mistakes in idiom and grammar had to be identical, the accent had to be really thick. Important gaps in our musical education had to be filled up. "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" as well as "Do You Ken John Peel" became prerequisites of life with honor. Gramophone records of Indian music were carefully put away, to be played at low volume during occasional bursts of defiant nationalism. A Sikh captain was rumored to have been cashiered for playing Indian music during a regimental guest night, though the official reason—which was probably true—was different. We avoided "native" food, but with a well-disposed colonel it was safe to eat an insipid curry and rice for lunch on Wednesdays and Sundays. On these afternoons a longer siesta was possible. We blushed at the vulgar smutty jokes of Indian origin; took pride in the refined smuttier ones of English descent. We became experts at bridge and poker. We downed drink for drink with tough Britishers. We worked and played and lived side by side with them. We ate at the same tables in the same regimental messes

and clubs. But notwithstanding the airs and the accents an undefined gap separated us. There was always the uneasy feeling that by behaving like the British we were deceiving no one but ourselves.

I proved an amateur in acquiring the Western graces. But I was saved by Colonel Denys F. Murphy, my first commanding officer. He was a strong-willed Irishman, a born champion of unpopular causes. He delighted in sailing against the wind and the tide. Within a week he had decided that my natural anachronism suited me better than forced modernity. His curt orders left no room for argument. If I wanted to get on with him, I was to be, and to remain, myself. I obeyed. We got on famously. He saw to it that my service standing did not suffer.

Also a little unreal was the traditional ritual of life in the regimental messes, with formal dinners in resplendent uniforms, eaten to the accompaniment of stirring music by military bands. There were rules even to guide your conversation: you were not to talk shop or sex, or religion or politics. If you accidentally mentioned your day's work, or let slip a lady's name, you were fined a round of drinks for everyone present. You could not discuss religion in a partisan manner if you valued the loyalty of your Indian soldiers, who belonged to different creeds and faiths. But the army forbade all talk of religion, partisan or otherwise; that was the only way to be safe.

Politics was even more delicate, almost explosive. The outside scene those days was dominated by the Indian independence movement, and on this subject the natural sympathies of the Indians were opposed to those of their British brother officers. Persons like Gandhi and Jinnah were patriots worthy of reverence to us juniors, and rebels guilty of treason to the British seniors in the same regiment. And like a person with an emotional conflict, the British Indian Army was meeting its painful dilemma by pushing it out of its consciousness.

But this dilemma was not easily ignored. In the years between

the two world wars, the struggle between Indian nationalism and British rule was the major preoccupation of the Indian press, and filled column after column of the newspapers which were read daily at their breakfast tables by all army officers, British and Indian. And the associated sense of gripping drama made it inevitable that political events in the country should occupy the thoughts of all of us.

Yet, the two races were able to work side by side in reasonable harmony, and as was my own experience, often with mutual pleasure. Though the Eastern and Western backgrounds were different, common service in the profession of arms produced a kind of brotherhood, which helped to keep peace inside the army while the political struggle was being decided outside.

Our daily routine was light and enjoyable. Formal official work was confined to a few leisurely hours in the morning. The middle of the day was spent in dark, curtained rooms in rest and sleep, though I often indulged in my love of reading. Where possible we had electric fans; otherwise there were overhead "punkhas," which produced a gentle breeze as they were pulled to and fro by a swaying servant. The sizzling hot summer sun could melt the asphalt on the road; it had no terrors for us. Thanks to the magic of "khas-khas tatties" we felt all the more cool by contrast. Khas-khas was a special long grass, golden yellow, seductively fragrant. Padded frames of it were fitted over doors and windows, and kept dripping wet by a water carrier. The pearly drops trickled downward, playing hide and seek through the straw, to cool the air as they evaporated with an almost audible sigh.

The afternoons were devoted to sport; tough, hard, fast, until every nerve and sinew in your aching body screamed with the joy of being alive. I never became good at any game, though in turn I played hockey, tennis, squash and polo. Guided by the example and precept of crack cavalry instructors, my boyhood fondness for riding became a mature lifetime interest.

Even in my fifties, I cannot resist an opportunity for a careless gallop over rough country.

A few months after I had joined the army, father came to stay with me and saw the life I was leading. He was critical.

"It seems," he commented, "that the army officer's problem is how to kill time, not how best to use it. That is the way of the parasite. A man's worth is measured by how much he contributes to society, not by how much he gets out of it. If there are not enough sick soldiers to keep you busy, there are plenty of other sick people around. You might help them."

I took father's advice, though not as much as I should have done. The army recruited only persons with healthy eyes, but civilians were heavy sufferers from all types of eye disease. Trachoma and cataract and many kinds of inflammation were common; there was much blindness that could be cured or made more bearable. Much could be prevented by following simple rules of hygiene, which could be taught easily and quickly. There was an ill-equipped, understaffed civil hospital in the cantonment run by a general practitioner. He was glad of any help that I could give him. For me this was professional experience that would not have come my way otherwise. I soon began to find great pleasure in a neatly done operation. This was particularly so with cataract, where good vision could often be restored to the totally blind in a dramatic manner. No fee could equal the incredulous wonder and gratitude of the smiling patients. No other procedure in surgery could be as rewarding for the surgeon.

Once a year, the Lahore garrison moved out thirty miles into surrounding country for annual training. I went along as medical officer to The Probyn's Horse, a crack cavalry regiment. We lived in tents, but in the moderate north Indian autumn, our spacious tents were more pleasant than a house. We ate better, though our dining table no longer groaned under the weight of massive candelabra and huge silver bowls filled with fresh-cut

flowers. This was a change, not a deprivation, for the country air was spice-laden with its own intoxications. Our camp furniture provided perfect physical comfort with a deceptive appearance of austerity. Our daily routine was grueling, but did not neglect such essentials of civilization as the evening hot bath, and the pre-dinner social hour when many of us reveled in spurious martyrdom to the accompaniment of whisky sodas and gin tonics. A few days before Christmas the training would culminate in thrilling mock battles with much firing of blank ammunition and exciting gallops by mounted lancers to practice mass cavalry charges.

But life in cantonments was not all fun and lighthearted work. One grueling summer our routine was broken when there was trouble between the Sikhs and Muslims of Lahore. The British civilian rulers tried to settle matters, and when they failed, they called in the army to knock the troublemakers on the head and teach them how to behave. A small detachment was moved from the luxurious cool of the cantonments to the sweaty, grimy slums of the crowded city bazaars. I went with it as medical officer.

It was a shock to come to close quarters with the grinding poverty of these fellow citizens. Their plight was well-known to me from my college days, but latterly, under the influence of brother British officers, I had been consciously trying to forget the existence of these sickly, dirty, half-starved people. The British ignored them naturally; theirs were two separate worlds. I ignored them even more, in the shame and exasperation that my own roots lay there. At having escaped the common lot, I felt sometimes proud, but often uneasy; now arguing that my privileges proved me better than the rest, now agreeing that with my opportunities many from those slums would have done equally well.

Matters came to a head when a mob shouting slogans pushed into a street that had been barred by the troops. A magistrate

read out the "Riot Act." I was standing next to him, but in the din I could not hear a word. The company commander was a blond youth with whom I had often played tennis. There were excited consultations between him and the magistrate. The officer went forward, and pointed with his cane toward the leaders of the mob. Then he blew his whistle, and thirty soldiers raised their loaded rifles.

Now there was no going back. The crowd stood still, hypnotized, rooted to the spot, their individual features clear in the bright sun. Suddenly, I recognized one of them, though he was no friend and I did not recall his name.

So far I was a detached spectator concerned only with official duty. With the sight of that one familiar face I found a sudden human bond with those others in the mob. My heart stood still, my stomach felt squeezed and torn in a vise, my knees went soggy and soft. "O God," I prayed, "at least save that one man."

The crisp voice of the blond Britisher rose to a high-pitched shriek as he shouted his grim command, "Fire." The command was instantly obeyed. An old gray-bearded man crumpled quietly on the road. A muscular hefty youth whose face was deep red with excitement was hit in the middle of the chest. Instantly, he went white. He pressed his hand against the scarlet patch spreading fast on his tattered shirt and fell backward. Others staggered a little distance before they dropped. How many were killed and how many wounded I could not say. Terror gripped the mob, which turned and fled, crushing and trampling many underfoot in the wild frenzy.

It was a shocking experience, but it did cleanse me of much foolish pride.



## CHAPTER VI

### *The Northwest Frontier and the Khyber*

IN MY third year of service I was promoted to captain, and sent to the northwest frontier. A good record of frontier service was an essential part of a well-rounded career in the Indian Army, and I was happy to find myself in this glamorous homeland of the proud, race-conscious Pathans. Many of them I knew well from my college days in Lahore. One was Nisar Durrani, also a doctor, and also now in the Indian Medical Service. On arrival at Peshawar—the social and political metropolis of the frontier—I was met by Lieutenant Durrani. A week under his tutelage and I was at home in my new surroundings. The kindness of his numerous friends could not have been greater if I had “belonged” there.

Nisar was an impressive figure: tall, ruggedly built, and in spite of a heavy frame he possessed the light-footed grace of a panther. His broad face was always lit by a smile, and under his thick, bushy eyebrows his large round eyes were eloquent with transparent sincerity. His hospitality was indiscriminating and overpowering; his sense of humor unfailing. To know him was to like him.

He presented me with a delightfully fragrant musk gland as soon as I had settled down in my room. It was an authentic specimen from the legendary home of the musk deer; the desert of Khotan in China. This was typical of Nisar. He had gone to much trouble to get this rarity for me, as some years earlier in

casual conversation I had wondered why musk had inspired generations of Eastern poets to lyrical song. It was the size of a walnut, covered all over with stiff curly hair, half golden brown, half pearly gray. Held close to the nose, it had a sickly overpowering odor of stale blood and raw hide; from a little distance, it gave off an elusive, delicate, intoxicating perfume. I am an expert at losing things of which I take special care, though there is ample excuse in the many travels and vicissitudes of my life. But thirty years later, I still keep coming across Nisar's present, as now and again I rummage through my untidy belongings. That it has not been lost is not a mere coincidence; it is a consequence of Nisar's sincerity. Its perfume seems eternal.

In climate and architecture Peshawar was much like Lahore. But the frontier town, justly famous in the East and the West, had a charm that captivated me at first sight. In the subsequent quarter of a century I have gone there again and again. With every visit I fall more deeply under its spell. Peshawar has been called the Paris of the Pathans, the Caravanserai of the Orient, the City of a Thousand and One Sins. It is hundreds of miles inland, but in its packed bazaars is as great a variety of color, of race, of dress, of human feature as in a major port town. Like the ocean tides, the long rhythm of history has ebbed and flowed through its streets, as Aryan, Greek, Hun, Mongol, Tartar, Persian, Afghan and British have advanced and retreated through the Khyber Pass, of which Peshawar is the eastern gateway. Even the uninitiated can see signs of the sojourn here of Pagan, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Christian. A good clue to the character of a city is the name of its principle street. Before ever going to London, New York, Paris, I had partly savored of their atmosphere by rolling such words on my tongue as Piccadilly, Broadway, Champs-Élysées. Peshawar fulfilled every anticipation in my first walk through the Kissa Khawani Bazaar, the Street of the Story-Tellers. It was like The Arabian Nights come to life.

But notwithstanding its romance and fascination, army life on this frontier between British India and Afghanistan was hard and tough, often grim and cruel. There were actually two frontiers, not one. First was the administrative border, up to which extended the normal complex machinery of the Indian government: municipal organizations, revenue and tax collectors, post offices, law courts, police, prisons. Well beyond was the international border with Afghanistan. Separating the two was a mountainous no man's land of varying depth, inhabited by numerous tribes; fierce, defiant; owing allegiance only to their ancient customs; heavily armed with modern rifles, which they used freely to raid the settled areas and to wage undeclared wars and vendettas among themselves.

To subdue and disarm these tribes had proved an impossible task for the British. This was no shame, for neither Alexander the Great, nor Mahmud of Ghazni, nor the Moghul emperors, nor any of the other great conquerors and rulers of Delhi and Kabul had done any better. Through all of recorded history, against the heaviest odds, the inhabitants of this tribal belt had successfully maintained a society which was the ultimate in independence and freedom for the individual, and only a step removed from anarchy.

British frontier policy was conducted by a small band of hand-picked officers called political agents. There was a separate political agent for each major tribal area, carefully groomed by his predecessors, fluent in the native dialect, well versed in tribal genealogies and blood feuds, familiar with the unwritten codes and taboos round which tribal life revolved. The main weapon with which he kept peace on the frontier was his own personality, though this would have been useless without two other weapons in reserve. He could stop the large cash allowances paid to tribal elders during good behavior, and the Indian Army was always at his call for a punitive incursion into the home ground of a recalcitrant tribe. The normal relationship between

the tribes and their political agents was a varying mixture of mutual liking and fear. Old-world courtesies and elaborate hospitality toward each other went hand in hand with crisis after crisis, deliberately raised to probe each other's strength of purpose. Sometimes from the conscious choice of a tribe, sometimes because of a formulated policy of the Indian government, and sometimes, without rhyme, reason, warning or premeditation, a trivial crisis blew up into open war.

In six years on the frontier I served in many stations and outposts. One that I recall with particular pleasure was Wana, an isolated, barbed-wired encampment deep inside the wild and turbulent Wazir and Mahsud tribal areas. My accommodation was comfortable, and the military hospital well equipped. There were wide roads, spacious lawns, beautiful gardens, a popular club house, reasonable shopping and many other amenities of a good Indian cantonment. Inside the barbed wire, and within the few miles around it commanded by the guns of our hilltop pickets, was the safe, familiar, friendly world I knew. Beyond was a world of queer fascination, of lurking unpredictable danger.

There were excellent army horses in Wana, and good riding country around it. Our makeshift polo was exciting, but the real thrill was the Wana Hunt. Our hounds were well trained to smell out and chase wild jackals, but in one respect these dogs were utter idiots. Disregarding elementary common sense, and in open defiance of strict army orders, they often led us "Out of Bounds," into areas beyond the reach of our guns. It is not easy to hit a galloping target, and no tribesman will uselessly waste his bullets. But whenever we slowed down from accident or fatigue, we were likely to draw quick hostile fire. Fortunately a solitary horse was the only life lost during my stay in Wana, though many of us had narrow escapes.

It was early autumn when I made my first journey to Wana. A hot, dusty, puffing toy train took me over the winding narrow-

gauge railroad to Manzai, the railhead. I stayed overnight with Captain Macaulay, the commanding officer of the Manzai Military Hospital. He had been a fellow student in London, and we were good friends. Wana was a further fifty miles away by a good military road. We would travel there in the weekly convoy the following day.

Army ritual was strictly enforced on the frontier. We dined in mess that night punctually at eight, resplendent in our blue patrols: smart jackets with stand-up decorated collars, buttons polished to perfection, wide scarlet side bands running down the length of our tight-fitting trousers, patent-leather Wellington boots with clanking silver spurs, miniature medals and decorations shining like jewelry on the lucky ones who had fought in World War I or in a campaign against tribesmen officially declared to be "active service."

I sat next to the officer who was to command the convoy. He had been in the area a year and knew it well. He assured me, with an obvious undertone of regret, that the convoy would get through safely. This part of the frontier had been unusually peaceful in the last six months. There had been only a dozen army casualties from tribal ambushes; raids into the nearby administered territory had dwindled to one or two a week; the last officer to be kidnaped and held for ransom had not been tortured.

Even so, the convoy was a meticulously planned military operation. It did not start until sorties of air force planes had reported the area clear of hostile concentrations. Two armored cars and a company of infantry machine gunners escorted us. The route varied from wild, open scrub country to winding climbs and descents through rugged narrow defiles. Important strategic heights along the way had been occupied since day-break by the Waziristan Scouts, an irregular armed militia recruited from friendly tribesmen under selected officers from the Indian Army. There were frequent halts, some for meals and

maintenance of vehicles, others for a last-minute reconnaissance of bridges and vulnerable places that had been the scenes of previous ambushes. The wild, inhospitable landscape continuously reminded me of Kipling's description of another part of the frontier.

There was rock to the left and rock to the right, and low  
lean thorn between,  
And thrice he heard a breech-bolt snick though never a  
man was seen.

We reached Wana safely after eight tension-filled hours. Everyone, including the tough convoy commander, breathed a sigh of relief. It felt good to get behind that deep double apron of barbed wire strung along the Wana perimeter. I wondered whether we had run any real risk. There was no way we could tell. I had not seen any suspicious-looking tribesmen, though all along I had been on the lookout. But we knew that a hundred unseen eyes had watched every move we had made. With monumental patience, the tribesmen would let us go by unharmed a hundred times. Then, next week, or next month, or next year, some convoy, somewhere, would expose itself by a false move. It would pay for it.

That is what happened to a convoy at Shahur Tangi a few months before I came away from the frontier. Some of the tribes were then openly hostile, and special precautions were enforced for all movement. This convoy of fifty trucks was escorted by four armored cars; one in the lead, one to bring up the rear, and two spaced in the middle. Relays of aircraft kept continuous watch overhead. The convoy left Manzai at dawn. Two hours later it entered Shahur Tangi, a narrow S-shaped cutting, with steep cliffs on both sides and no room for maneuver. One moment everything was peaceful and quiet; the next all hell had broken loose. Every part of the convoy was under simultaneous fire from tribesmen concealed behind large boulders. They had moved into their positions during the night, one by one, un-

observed. They aimed the first volleys at the drivers and killed many of them instantly. The trucks, out of control, smashed into other vehicles. The tangled convoy came to an immediate standstill. In the close-quarter fighting that ensued between the infantry and the tribesmen, the immobilized armored cars could seldom fire at the enemy without danger to friends. Elaborate rescue operations were mounted both from Manzai and Wana. These had to be conducted with deliberation and care and took much time. Not until the next day could the dead and wounded be brought in. The toll had been grievous. Among those killed was Nisar Durrani.

The frontier area where I served longest was the Khyber Pass. Khyber is the most important gateway in the fifteen-hundred-mile barrier of lofty snow-clad mountains which guard the Indian subcontinent to the northwest. To anyone with a sense of history, even a fleeting visit to the Khyber is a memorable experience. When I received orders posting me to the military hospital at Landi Kotal, the large military garrison near the Afghan border, I was thrilled. Many of the bedtime stories I had heard from mother and father had been about famous kings marching down the Khyber in an unending historical procession, in search of empire, adventure and glory.

I recognized the main landmarks of the Khyber as I drove past them. I was familiar with them from photographs seen in school books. Where the wide open plain changed abruptly into menacing hills stood the fort of Jamrud, its massive ramparts shaped like a monster battleship. Halfway up the pass was the perilous narrow gorge of Ali Masjid, where it is dusk even at noonday, and where a small band of determined men can halt a whole army. Three miles before Landi Kotal, prominent on the skyline of a nearby hill, was a huge mound of small bricks blackened with age; a two-thousand-year-old Buddhist stupa.

For a closer look at it I stopped the car, and as I got out my

foot slipped on a stone. Intending to throw it away where it would not trip someone else, I picked it up. Smoothly rounded, silver gray in color, mottled all over with uniform pink dots, circled with two prominent bands of pure white marble, it was very pretty. I summoned up my knowledge of geology and looked questioningly at the stone and the surrounding terrain. What fiery upheaval had given it birth? What cataclysms of nature had it witnessed? I looked around but there were no similar stones nearby. Clearly nature had not put it there. It must have been carried there by man from some far-off place; perhaps a river in Greece, perhaps a stream in Central Asia. Perhaps it had cast its spell on some spoiled child in an invading emperor's entourage. Fascinated by similar stones during my own childhood wanderings, I had often carried them from one end of India to another. I decided to keep that stone. It lay on my table throughout my stay in Landi Kotal. When I left, I put it back in its original place. To others it was a charming paperweight. To me it epitomized the romance of the Khyber.

With the stone in my pocket I climbed to the top of the hill. There was not much to see in the stupa, but the view in all directions was impressive: range after range of gradually increasing heights to the north and the south; those in the far distance under a mantle of heavy snow. Ahead of me to the west, the steep descent into Afghanistan. A long camel caravan coming up the pass, moving gracefully with silent, patient, time-defying strides. This was a large group of nomad tribesmen, the Powindahs, on their annual migration between Afghanistan and India. I came down to the road to watch them go by. Four generations of men, women and children in family groups, some on foot, others riding the padded wooden saddles roomy enough for four or five. Some awake, busy in animated cross-talk; some asleep, swaying gently from side to side to the lazy rhythm of camel gait. The women were dressed mostly in black, which heightened the beauty of their fair complexions and made a



perfect background for their quaint silver ornaments. The men, mostly in long shirts and baggy trousers that were once white and now a sorry gray, walked with a loose-limbed dignity that hid all lack of cleanliness. There was a dirty urchin about eight years old indulging in a tantrum. He ran here and there, weaving in and out under the bellies of unconcerned camels. Chasing him ineffectively was his frantic, doting mother, holding forth a boiled egg as a bribe. Under the watchful eyes of staid elders, youthful boys and girls were treating each other with a show of indifference, and seeking unnoticed opportunities for meaningful glances and eloquent gestures.

I thought of the depth and variety of human emotions that must be traveling with that caravan. There in front of me, if only I had the eyes to see, might be wild passions, great sorrows, towering hates, base jealousies, selfless friendships, abiding loves, deep affections. Of these I could catch no glimpse. I could only see and remember the material things that were going past: tents, boxes, carpets, chickens, goats, horses, dogs; bundles of clothing and tinned-copper cooking pots, obviously gathered in a hurry that morning and tied up anyhow in precarious colorful confusion. No one took any notice of me, except one camel. It gave me a long withering look of sullen, disdainful arrogance. I knew what it meant. The British Army had camped in the Khyber less than a hundred years. Its place would be taken one day by some other army. The tribesmen and their camels would come and go in the Khyber forever, as they had done throughout the past.

The Khyber was a heavily fortified international highway: major troop concentrations every ten miles, strong gun emplacements at every height, permanently manned day and night, reserve supplies of food, water and ammunition in tunneled galleries, elaborate systems of communication. There were two military hospitals: a large one at Landi Kotal and a smaller one at Shaghai. I served at each of them for a year. The hospital in

Shanghai was my first independent command. My military duties there were light, for the troops were too busy to have much illness. So I encouraged my tribal neighbors to make professional use of my abundant spare time. Now and again I was taken under promise of safe conduct to a village to see someone too ill to be brought to me. Each village was a walled-in group of two or three houses. At one corner would be a prominent watchtower with vertical slits, from which was often visible the glint of a steel barrel. This was a practical necessity of the local way of life, in which rifles were sometimes the only way out in disputes involving questions of honor. I performed many emergency operations, extracting deeply embedded bullets from stomachs, limbs and brains. Considering the conditions under which I worked, the survival rate was good. This was not due to my skill, for I had not been trained for such difficult surgery. It was the tribesman's indomitable will to live and get his revenge, his unbelievable toughness. He will not take an anesthetic for the amputation of a finger or the setting of a fracture. He will clench his teeth, and without word or show of complaint will sit through these procedures with complete calm. Such stoicism was unnerving, and the surgeon often ended up more exhausted than the patient.

Up to about midday, both civil and military traffic moved about the Khyber freely and without convoy. Traffic was stopped with enough daylight hours still left in which to chase and catch a troublemaker within the area commanded by permanent fortifications. Incidents did occur occasionally, though major trouble was rare. But twenty miles to the north and the south were chronic trouble areas, and those serving in the Khyber often got involved. That happened to me in the summer of 1933 while I was at Shanghai.

There had been unrest throughout that year in the Mohmand tribal area to the north of the Khyber. This was possibly the aftermath of the recent dynastic upheavals in neighboring Af-

ghanistan. There, His Majesty King Amanullah had been overthrown by an upstart, appropriately named Bacha Saqau, Son of the Water Carrier. Amanullah had fled to Rome. The water carrier's reign had lasted three days. He was overthrown in turn by Nadir Shah, who was now the Afghan monarch. He had been recognized as such by his British neighbors, who wanted to see him firmly established. But Nadir Shah had many enemies, who joined hands with the Mohmands, a tribe living on both sides of the international border who were in a vile anti-British mood that year. The hostile group had found three dynamic leaders, with headquarters in a remote village called Kotkai.

From air photos we soon became familiar with Kotkai. It was a typical mud-walled hamlet, with four turrets and less than a hundred inhabitants. But little was known of the three hostile leaders, who were dubbed the "mystery men." One was the pretender to the throne, a distant relative of ex-King Amanullah. One was called Lewanni Fakir, the Mad Priest; the third was Tor Malang, the Black Mystic. We could guess what the Pretender wanted, though at times his very existence seemed doubtful. What the other two, or the Mohmands, wanted was not clear. There were months of the usual parleys between the tribal chiefs and the political agent. These were suddenly terminated by a demand from the Indian capital for the immediate surrender of the mystery men. To ensure the surrender, two hundred Mohmands working in Peshawar were taken into British custody as hostages.

It was eternal dishonor for a tribe to surrender a person that had sought its hospitality. The issue was now squarely joined. A strong column of troops set out from Peshawar with the announced intention of building a road into the hitherto inviolate heart of Mohmand country. It consisted of crack troops from the Rajput, Baluch and Punjab regiments, strong cavalry and armored elements, two batteries of mountain guns and elaborate supporting services to make it a self-contained force. I went

with a field ambulance, the Indian term for a medical regiment. Our commander was Brigadier Auchinleck, affectionately known as "The Auk." Auk was an acknowledged master of frontier warfare who subsequently became a field marshal, and in World War II was pitted against Erwin Rommel in the Western Desert.

The belligerents fired their opening shots simultaneously. Air force planes carried out a dawn bombing of Kotkai. The Mohmands sniped at bridges, pickets and at road-building parties. There were no casualties on either side. Carrying with them their meager belongings, the Mohmands had moved from mud huts into safe hillside caves. The snipers had been kept at ineffective range by our armored cars and guns.

For the first few days we were sustained by intense activity and great excitement. But in less than a week we were sobered by the grim realities of our situation. The heat was intense. I remember the day when we marched from Shabkadar to set up a new camp at Dand. An hour after sunrise, the intense glare reflected off the bare brown hills began stabbing the eyes like sharp needles. Under load of heavy packs, we were continuously drenched in sweat; our neat khaki uniforms were soon turned into dirty white parchment by the dried salt of our perspiration. By midday half the troops had become casualties from sunstroke. We gasped for breath. The air was still, but to our fevered vision it seemed to shake and tremble in constant agony. The ground underfoot was an oven. Madly spinning dust devils appeared suddenly from nowhere, and sweeping across the landscape, choked our bleary eyes with gritty dirt. We reached Dand by early afternoon, parched and tired, but there was no rest. The hardest labor of the day began now. We had to dig ourselves in if we were not to be overrun during the night. Pickets had to be established on neighboring high points, dug in, fenced in by barbed wire and stocked with Verey lights and hand grenades.

We had hardly sat down to dinner by the dim light of kerosene lamps when pandemonium broke loose. In a deep ravine on one edge of our camp, we had tied our horses and transport

mules. The ravine had steep zigzag banks, and using the safety of their dark shadows, a group of hostiles had crept in unnoticed and were shooting up the helpless animals. Some were killed, many broke loose, stampeding in all directions, causing general confusion and throwing out of gear our well-rehearsed plans for meeting such attacks. Those without an active role in the counterattack merely put out their lights and sat still. Our casualties that night were light; only a few wounded with no one killed. But this was not always the case. Every now and again, a sniper's bullet made a fatal rendezvous with someone whose earthly life had run out.

Drawing philosophic comfort from the laws of probability, I could grin and bear the nightly sniping. But there was one misery of Dand that was impossible to bear with fortitude. Flies. Our sanitation was primitive; there were too many animals and men in too small an area, water was rationed and temperature and humidity were just what a fly would order. But not all this was explanation enough for the teeming multitudes of flies at Dand. There was but one answer. For some mysterious reason, all the flies of all the five continents had moved to Dand with us.

There was also ample evidence that the Dand flies were a new breed. The common or garden houseflies are sneaky cowards, underhanded, evasive, thieves by stealth. Not so the flies at Dand. They knew no fear, death meant nothing to them. Using every known variety of manual and scientific weapon we killed them by the million. Disregarding the slaughter, they kept coming at us in swarms that were like dense clouds. They crawled into our ears, they flew up our nostrils, they rushed down our throats every time we opened our mouths; and they did these things with a despicable persistence that reduced us to a wild frenzy. They gave us diarrhea. They gave us dysentery. But that was nothing compared to the revolting horror of their physical impact.

The building of the Mohmand road was a slow, expensive

process. According to established custom the work was entrusted to the nearby friendly tribes, on a cost-plus basis. The tribesmen used clumsy hand picks and shovels, but there were compensating advantages. They arranged their own supplies and looked after their own safety. The Mohmands sniped at them for the first few days, and left them alone thereafter. This was good tribal wisdom. Honor had been satisfied, and in turn, the Mohmands would one day get the same consideration.

There was other give and take between the Mohmands and the "friendlies." When harassed by army engineers for quicker progress, the "friendlies" brought along idle Mohmand friends to work on the road. The engineers could not tell them apart. When a Mohmand wanted to play truant from his allotted night-time sniping, he gave the necessary ammunition to a delighted "friendly," who attacked us with even greater gusto.

Our agents and air reconnaissance often reported hostile concentrations in our vicinity. We would immediately march out to meet them in the hope that they would stand and fight. They never did. This was frustrating for our high command, who had vastly superior military weapons and wanted a quick clean end to the campaign. Lack of bloody action was also disappointing for us. On starting for Mohmand country, we had congratulated ourselves that this would count as "active service" and would be the making of our careers. Everyone would get a campaign medal; some would earn decorations and awards. But regulations were strict on what constituted "active service." Close-quarter face-to-face fighting was essential, even though not many need be killed. The ordeal by flies and dysentery and the nightly sniping were not enough, even though we were decimated.

Once or twice each week we would hopefully set out from our camp to seek the battle that was to make our careers. The infantry would march directly toward reported hostile positions. The cavalry would make wide sweeping moves to get behind

them. Through strong field glasses I would now and again spot some moving dots on a distant hill. They would suddenly emerge from behind one large rock and quickly vanish behind another. Our guns would blast into quick action. I would sit close behind the guns and watch the sleek black shells fly through the air in a high trajectory. Making a characteristic screechy moan, they would grow smaller and smaller and go out of sight. A momentary red flash would appear on the distant hill, and grow quickly into a large fluffy ball of gray smoke. Some minutes later would come a deep rumble, which would echo back and forth from many directions. This would go on until midday when we would begin withdrawing to the safety of our barbed wire. It was wonderful military training, but not "active service" under regulations.

In about two months our disillusionment was complete. The Mohmands also began to get bored. Relations between the tribal elders and the political agent suddenly became friendly. The "mystery men" vanished mysteriously; the demand for their surrender was conveniently forgotten. My thoughts turned from current discomforts to the trip that I would soon make to Kashmir on leave. It would be delightful, but no consolation for missing that campaign medal.

The date for return to our peace stations was fixed. When it was a week away the Mohmands made their parting farewell gesture to us. They ambushed an infantry column out on road patrol and in close battle killed many of our soldiers. I was on duty when the blood-drenched wounded were brought to the camp hospital. Two of them had died on the way. Both of them had been my pupils in a first-aid class a few months earlier. I was genuinely grieved at the death of my comrades. But to my shame it was not unmixed sorrow. There was also the satisfaction that "active service" rules had been satisfied. We would get the campaign medal.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Qamar*

FATHER had been unhappy at the unfortunate result of my student-day marriage. It made him even more unhappy when he found me in no hurry to marry again. He considered celibacy unnatural; marriage a duty which men and women owed to themselves, to society and to God. Father's definition of a virtuous life was simple: a life as full as one could make it, a balanced growth of all the physical and moral faculties. The Lord had endowed us with great gifts, for which we must render him thanks; not merely by our lips, but by making good use of those gifts.

"Then how is it," I asked, "that some even praise celibacy as a virtue?"

"Some go further," he said. "To them complete renunciation of the world is the greatest virtue; the most praiseworthy life, the life of the hermit."

"But don't you admire the courage that gives up the world?"

"That is not courage, that is a search for the easy way. No one calls a suicide brave, that is the act of a coward. For real courage, see the continuous self-discipline of the God-fearing person who accepts the thousand challenges of the material world. The ascetic is as misguided as the pleasure seeker; in their different ways both are trying to escape from reality. And with sex in particular both go to extremes. But they chase a mirage that may nourish their delusions but will never quench their thirst."

Marriage and parenthood are the blessings of a full life,



rejected only by those afraid to mature beyond adolescence. Every blessing has its obligations, but only a fool rejects the blessings on that account. In due course I accepted father's arguments, partly on their merits, partly no doubt because of the basic urges of a healthy body. In the choice of whom to marry I had once again to be guided by my family.

This was inevitable in my orthodox Muslim environment, with its strictly regulated contacts between the sexes and its special standards of modesty for men and women. The Qurān required women "not to display their charms" outside their family circle; men were to "turn their gaze downward" on meeting a woman from outside the family. There were lapses from this high standard, as there are from any code anywhere, but this upbringing had made it difficult for me to look full-eyed on female beauty without an accompanying sense of bravado. I was barred from appraising woman after woman, until through some mystical biological process I had fallen in love.

"Did you let others choose your wife for you?" is a question that I am often asked by my Western friends. "Not quite" is my usual reply. "I was on the selection committee, and I had a veto." These friends find it even more difficult to believe that Qamar and I had seen each other only once before our marriage. For us two that once was enough, though to some our choice would have made better sense if we had first become crazy about each other.

Not that I mind being crazy in a good cause, or object to falling in love, for that is just what has been the case with me with Qamar ever since our marriage. Happy marriages are made in heaven, and ours must have been made in its most hallowed spot, for since the time that Qamar has come into my life, it has acquired a rich new dimension that cannot be expressed in words. She has multiplied my joys, divided my sorrows, resolved my doubts, lightened my burdens, nursed my

illnesses, dispelled my fears, nourished me with her love and challenged me with her stubborn independence. Every time I see her, I humbly wonder at God's great design which made man and woman different, so as to give them the gift of complementing each other in a union of ecstatic happiness.

Qamar was twelve years younger than I. Her background was in some ways like my own, in others very different. She had been brought up in the relatively prosperous town of Sialkot. The only other place she knew at all was Lahore, where she had gone to college. She was an only child. Home to her was one particular brick and cement building, a fixed axis for the daily round of life, an ordered place of quiet, silent dignity, with clean floors where the presence of a cobra was unthinkable and the appearance of a mouse cause for consternation. In spite of the prevailing prejudice against Western education for women, from which her own family was not free, she had obtained a B.A. degree in the humanities. Her home town was only thirty miles from my ancestral village. Our two families were known to each other, their social and cultural patterns were the same, their economic status was similar. One of her uncles was a well-known eye doctor, and a friend of my father. By common consent of many critical female reporters, she was very beautiful.

A month before the date fixed for our marriage, I fell seriously ill. Some carelessness in swimming produced an infected left ear, and the infection spread through the skull bones toward the sinuses of the brain. Within brief hours of the diagnosis, my head was shaved and I was wheeled into the operation theater for emergency surgery. The surgeon and the anesthetist were British colleagues in whose competence and skill I had full confidence.

The process of anesthesia, like the process of sleep, had often intrigued me. Surely there must be two successive moments, of which the first is wakefulness and the next is sleep. I am

often gripped by a tantalizing desire to halt and examine this transition. Sometimes, by some trick of introspection, I seem almost about to succeed. Usually, I only give myself insomnia. I was now seized by a desire to understand the steps by which I would succumb to the anesthetic. I decided to resist going under as long as possible. Perhaps I could resist it entirely. What a laugh that would give me at the expense of my colleagues!

After a momentary feeling of suffocation, I began drifting through the clouds. The human voices around me changed into a large orchestra. Its main instrument was a silver gong of dazzling brightness. It was being hit rhythmically by a big black hammer. At one of its beats, the hammer swung right through the gong and hit me on the head. Everything melted instantly into a shuddering metallic explosion. The next thing I knew was waking up in my room, weak and exhausted, with an agonizing pain in my heavily bandaged head. Recovery was uneventful. I was up in ten days. Twenty days later I kept my marriage date with Qamar.

The timing of that illness was fortunate; its consequences fruitful. It brought me eight months' convalescent leave on full pay, with a luxury round-trip passage to Europe for myself and an attendant. Qamar filled that role with distinction; I exploited the arrangement to the full. Later, from inborn goodness, she let my privileges of convalescence become the habits of a lifetime.

We bought ourselves a small Ford car in London, and traveled at leisure and in comfort over much of western Europe. Without spoiling our holiday, I spent as much time as possible at some of the well-known eye hospitals. Our longest stay was at Vienna, which combined high professional interests with artistic and cultural attractions. We stayed there for four delightful months, but left hurriedly for Prague when Hitler marched in to annex Austria. Because of Qamar I did not want to risk being caught in any trouble.

The elegant two-room flat in which we stayed in Vienna was a landmark in our lives. It was our first proper married establishment. It was just off the Ringstrasse, within easy reach of the picture galleries and St. Stephen's Cathedral, both of which we visited often. Some things Qamar still recalls lovingly: the Rubens' cherubs in the large roof-high paintings, their expression an intriguing mixture of innocence and naughtiness, vulgarity and decorum, shyness and bravado; the beautiful stained glass of the church, the music and dignity of its services, especially a moving Christmas performance of Bach's Mass in B Minor; the wistful, sad face of an old lady in a black shawl from whom we bought fresh roasted chestnuts every time we took a walk near the now-empty Hapsburg Imperial palaces.

I suppose any intelligent person traveling in Europe at the time would have foreseen the catastrophe that was to overtake it two years later. I noticed nothing. I was too engrossed in Qamar. Judging by other Indian men and women, Qamar's first experience of Europe should have swept her off her feet, but its impact on her was hardly noticeable. We saw much in those eight months, but we were not deeply concerned with our surroundings. We were too busy discovering each other and creating a private world of our own. This voyage of creation and discovery still goes on, smoothly on the whole, though not without an occasional storm. But with every day that has passed, our private world has become more important and more real than the great big world around us.

We spent the three years following our return from Europe mostly in Central India. I worked as consultant in eye diseases to a group of scattered military garrisons; some in the hot and densely cultivated plain of the sacred Ganges and Jumna rivers, others in the salubrious and beautiful mountain resorts of the Central Himalayas. There was also a variety of work with civilian patients, from surgery for the poor and aged villagers, half-blind or worse from trachoma or cataract, to elaborate

preventive care of the young rich students of a select private school in Dehra Dun.

Qamar ran a simple household in Meerut Cantonment, about forty miles from New Delhi. We lived outwardly much as our British and Indian colleagues did, in a spacious bungalow with large grounds and a lovely garden. But our life lacked many of the sophistications and graces of our neighbors. We continued our childhood way of sitting down to meals on a carpet, though we enjoyed our food equally well if there were friends and we used a table and comfortable dining chairs. Unlike other Indian "wives," Qamar did not adopt the modern sari. She kept her traditional Punjabi dress of kameez, shalwar and dopatta. (These are a long loose shirt, full baggy trousers and a wide stole covering the head and the bosom.) Nor did she take to modern cosmetics. This was just as well, for artificial aid would only have been a reflection on her natural beauty. Nothing could have enhanced it. At least so I thought then, not knowing that every passing year would make her more and more beautiful.

In September, 1939, Britain entered World War II, and this put the British Indian Army and myself also at war. But for its first two years the war remained distant and unimportant, and produced no impact on our private world. However, our private world underwent dramatic changes from other causes. For Qamar and me, it had been comfortable and roomy, but a third person now joined it, arriving literally from nowhere. I felt a little crowded, and I was baffled whether to treat the newcomer as an intruder or as a friend. I wonder whether Qamar sensed my problem when she gave our newborn son his name, Anis, friend. Soon after Anis came Munir, and then the war caught up with our world.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *"Pole-Evac"*

I HAD NOW REACHED the rank of major, with a varied record both in professional work and in administration. Not many others of my seniority had commanded hospitals in the turbulent Khyber Pass or seen active service against hostile tribesmen. When the wartime expansion of the Indian Army began, I was promoted to lieutenant colonel well before my turn, and ordered to organize a medical regiment for overseas service.

A few years earlier, father had retired from the Indian railroads on reaching the official age limit of fifty-five. His abundant energy would have been wasted in our small ancestral village. So he made the medium-sized town of Qadian his home, with the intention of busying himself with religious and social work. As a sideline, he agreed to manage a hosiery factory which had long been running at a loss. Almost at once it became a profitable business, which he expanded to provide welcome employment for many poor villagers. He treated them so well that they were soon bringing him their personal sorrows and troubles. They could wake him up in the middle of the night and be sure of a cup of tea and kind help. He had become the patient and sympathetic head of a family of many thousands.

When I went away to Poona in South India to raise the medical regiment, Qamar took Anis and Munir to Qadian to be near father. She settled down there in a small rented house to await my return from overseas service.

My new command would be known as the 22nd Indian Medical Regiment. It would include officers and men from all

over India, and some also from other parts of the British Empire. Among them would be Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims. We were mostly strangers to each other. The only persons already known to me were Captain Fazal Elahi, the adjutant, and my soldier orderly, Maula Bux, whom I called Maulee for short.

Now I had the task of training the regiment and welding it into a smoothly functioning machine. Each individual had to be given his specific duties, which he had to practice and rehearse until we achieved precision and effortless co-ordination. It required hard work, but we reached a high standard and felt well rewarded by the aesthetic pleasure of a job done well. We were praised by our superiors, but this we took in our stride. We were, however, grateful to them when they asked us to stage a demonstration for others, for we loved every chance of showing off our skill.

In four months we were a crack regiment. What is more, we had become a happy family. Soon we were put in readiness to sail from Bombay at short notice. But before that I was given a fortnight's home leave. All too quickly came the day of return to the regiment. Qamar decided to travel with me as far as Lahore. Father said good-by to me at the railroad station of Qadian. So did my brothers, Karamat and Zia, now successful businessmen, who had come specially from Peshawar and Lucknow. There were also many friends.

In our leisurely Eastern manner we had assembled half an hour before the train was to leave. The family youngsters handled the chores, such as buying the ticket and putting away my baggage. The elders stood around me and talked.

In the place of honor in the group stood my father. On his head was his customary blue-gray turban, but there was an added grace about it as if he had tied it that day with more than usual care. Every hair of his flowing patriarchal beard and every wrinkle of his expressive, sympathetic face radiated a

gentle peace. His eyes were a little misty, but his calm voice was as deep and resonant as ever.

Father had his established ritual for such occasions; only today it seemed even more solemn because of the uncertainty about where I was going and how long I would be away. Shortly before starting time, he raised his hands in supplication and called for a short prayer. "Let us now pray for divine protection and blessings for this journey. All praise to the Lord Who made this train subservient to us, for we had not the power by ourselves to do so. May this journey begin in the name of the Lord, and may it end in the name of the Lord. Amen!"

I had heard this prayer from father since my childhood. He would say it whenever he mounted a horse or a cart or a camel, or got into a train. Later when he bought an automobile, it still came to him as of habit, to be said half aloud as he settled down behind the driving wheel. It was the same in everything else. For whatever he was about to do there was a short and earnest prayer suitable to the occasion.

There was a moment's silence, and I shook hands all around. Then I came to where father stood. As was his custom he held me in a loose embrace, and I bent low for him to kiss me on the head.

"Good-by to the world's laziest letter writer," he said. "I wonder if we will get any news of you until we see you again."

"You will, father," I replied. "It is different this time."

"That remains to be seen."

"And I shall need your prayers more than ever."

"You have them always. But God is as much with you as with me, and remember that He never turns down a cry of distress."

Father went on to quote one of his favorite passages from the Holy Book. "When My servants ask about Me, tell them that I am always near. I answer the suppliant whenever he calls Me, only let him do My bidding and have faith in Me, so that he will be rightly guided."



Qamar and the children came with me to Lahore and I parted from them the next day with a numbed sorrowful feeling. A few days later we were sent to Bombay, where we boarded a troopship. As the senior medical officer of the ship, I had a comfortable cabin and an office to myself, and took my meals at the captain's table. My previous ocean voyages had been pleasant, carefree, lazy holidays; days of sport and sleep, nights of social gaiety in brilliantly lit saloons. Now there was much official work, and at night there was a strict blackout. It was a somber voyage, spent in a prayerful mood. Soon we were across the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, and were landed at Basra in Iraq. After a few weeks we were moved to Baghdad, where we spent interminable dull months, relieving the tedium by visits to Babylon, Ur and Ctesiphon, and expecting any moment to be sent to join the dramatic battles that were being fought against Rommel in the Western Desert. Then we were unexpectedly ordered to travel in the opposite direction to go to Teheran in Persia. The corps surgeon came personally to see us off. "You have been selected for a very important mission," he said. "But I am not free to tell you about it."

Six months earlier Britain and Russia had waged a three-day war against Persia to eliminate German influence from that country, and during our seven-day journey we heard details of the encounter from participants and eyewitnesses. At best it would have been an unequal fight; it had been made more so by the organization of the Persian Army.

Modern armies are often criticized for having an unduly long administrative tail. The organizers of the Persian Army did not believe in such waste—their hard-hitting, hundred-per-cent fighting army had no administrative tail at all. Once it took up battle positions, it had to fight where it stood, or not fight at all. Its first encounter had to be the decisive battle. Having no transport services, it could neither chase a fleeing enemy nor retire intact before a superior foe. How hard hitting the

Persian Army was must remain an unanswered question of history, for the British and the Russians did not attack along expected routes and avoided pitched battles. This clearly amounted to cheating; so the Persian rank and file threw away their arms and returned to their homes in disgust. In sympathy with their brethren in arms, the civil servants also went home in a huff. However, by the time of our arrival in Persia, conditions had returned to normal, though there were many signs that we were not welcome.

Just about that time the Japanese were winning resounding victories in the Far East, and the tragic news of the fall of Singapore came when we were two days' journey from Teheran. This had caused great excitement in the Persian capital, and to avoid any unpleasant incidents we decided not to go into the city. We made for a camp outside the town by a changed route which avoided the populated parts. But somehow our plan leaked out, and a large crowd gathered in the fields which lay along our new route. In the crowd were hundreds of school children, and it was a mystery how so many of them managed to play truant at the very moment that we reached there. "Go back, go back," they shouted as we came by. "Your place is in Singapore. Hurray for Singapore! Hurray for Singapore!"

I could only hope that my soldiers, not knowing Persian, would think we were getting a welcome. But there was no mistaking the mood of that crowd. They were not only hostile, they were also making fun of us. It was most depressing. The depression was made worse by the thought of many intimate friends and comrades who I knew were in Singapore and other parts of the Malayan theater. I wondered how many were dead, how many prisoners in the hands of a brutal enemy. And I recalled, without deriving any satisfaction from the thought, that my own regiment had at one stage been due to go that way.

But there was also a strange and personal reason to make that day unforgettable. When our regiment was first raised in

India, it had been given mules and horses to fit it for jungle fighting in Burma or Malaya. Later, when the mules were replaced by mechanical transport, it became the favorite pastime of my officers to guess our new overseas destination. Finally, at a routine weekly meeting shortly before our embarkation date they pressed me for my opinion.

"I have no official knowledge," I replied. "According to normal practice, I shall not be told until we are well out at sea."

They persisted, and rather reluctantly I decided to share my surmise with them.

"I believe we shall at some stage go to Teheran, but this is without the slightest official basis."

I could hardly tell them the source of my knowledge. It was a dream of Qamar's, which to her had been so vivid that she was certain it would come true.

She had dreamed it a few hours after saying good-by to me at the end of my brief embarkation leave. During those few days we had avoided all talk of the future in an unsaid make-believe that we were together for good. Normally a rough, uncouth person, I found myself being soft and considerate to her without trying to be so. She was then expecting our third child, and as a doctor I knew how much she was suffering physically. She had suffered much previously at such times, but now she denied it vehemently.

"Look into the mirror, Qamar, and see how pale you are," I would insist.

She would look into the mirror long enough to satisfy me. "Nonsense," she would then say. "Even you are beginning to imagine things."

Her pallor was heightened by contrast with her long black hair, and it gave her beautiful oval face a radiant serenity I had never seen before. Our prescribed daily prayers were offered with greater devotion, and during that wonderful week, as Qamar knelt side by side with me, I often had the feeling that

I was praying in company with an angel.

Our prayers were not so much for the future. We thought mostly of the past and the present, and were happy to offer thanks for the divine blessings we had received in large measure. That was the mood in which we said good-by to each other. We were certainly sad as we parted, but we were at peace with each other and with the world.

When I rejoined the regiment, I was handed my accumulated mail, including a letter from Qamar. In it was her dream.

As your train moved away [she had written] Anis and Munir made quite a scene with their crying for daddy. But I quickly got them interested in the wonderful things they believe you are going to do in the war. Anis was soon acting out a surprise parachute landing behind the enemy's lines, and in the role of Maula Bux, he perpetrated an unprecedented single-handed massacre. They cheerfully ate the special dinner which you wanted me to cook them and were soon asleep. My dear husband, you need not worry; I am going to face the realities of this new life bravely. I know you want me to do it that way.

But if now and again I err a little, as I did later in the night when left alone with my thoughts, I beg you not to get angry. I had a sudden desperate need to weep, and it was a relief to let those sorrowful tears flow. Soon I had sobbed myself to sleep.

Then I had an astonishing dream. I saw a kindly person consoling me in words of surpassing sweetness. As he continued talking, his voice took on the quality of a ringing bell. The only actual words I remember are these: ATA-ULLAH HAS GONE TO TEHERAN, AND TEHERAN HAS BECOME A FAMILY STATION. That was the last sentence. It was a short dream, and I have told it in few words. But I cannot describe its unusual vividness. It immediately filled my whole being with a peaceful calm, which I feel even now as I write about it.

Please, Ata, for our sakes, take care of yourself. May God keep you safe for us.

Qamar's dream was much in my mind on that day when we first entered Teheran, and I derived a mystical comfort from remembering it. I dwelt on it, and for a fleeting moment of

forgetfulness produced for myself the illusion that she was riding by my side. But not for long. The insistent stark reality of the moment was that mob screaming and shouting at us: "Go back, go back. Your place is in Singapore. Hurray for Singapore! Hurray for Singapore!"

Weeks went by in Teheran and the hush-hush assignment did not materialize. We were forgotten, though fortunately there were many compensations. The surrounding countryside was beautiful, the town still unspoiled, as we were the only foreign troops there. We had become experts at living in comfort under field-service conditions. Our living and dining rooms, though in tents, were the height of luxury.

It did not worry us unduly that such luxury was contrary to regulations, and these tents, authorized only for field hospitals, were four times the size of tents that we should have been using. The fault was not ours, but of the army planners who had decreed the impossible size of a medical regiment's tents from the comfort of their large rooms in Delhi.

While we were still in Basra, my officers had found themselves in revolt against the army planners. The immediate provocation came from a field hospital that had pitched their luxury tents tantalizingly close to our lines. Our observant adjutant, Captain Fazal Elahi, saw these tents, and raised the subject at our next weekly meeting.

"There are two large tents next to our lines," he said, "which seem to have been written off by the hospital. They would be very useful to us. We ought to take them over."

"What makes you think they have written them off?" I asked. "They have no authority to do so."

"No one ever cleans them, or even takes the trouble to keep the guy ropes tight. For three weeks now they have been occupied by a pair of donkeys."

I immediately sent another officer to check this. The donkeys

were still there, obviously in permanent residence.

We debated the matter and found our duty clear. As public servants, we must see that the taxpayers' property was put to the best use. We dispossessed the donkeys and moved the tents to our area. They became our new mess tents.

Some evenings later, we gave a mess-warming banquet. The guest of honor was the commanding officer of the neighboring hospital and I was a little nervous as I welcomed him.

"Do you like our new mess?" I asked hesitantly.

"Absolutely first class" was his ungrudging comment. "How do you manage these things?"

"Through the courtesy of forgetful friends," I was about to say, when a mess waiter came along and thrust a large whisky and soda into the hand of our gallant guest. We were safe.

When the fortunes of war moved us a thousand miles away to Teheran, those tents helped to cement international good will. We entertained in our mess the surgeon general of the Persian Medical Services and his officers, as well as the only representative in Teheran at that time of the United States Medical Corps, Major Neuwirth.

As doctor to a mission under the command of General J. Greeley, Neuwirth reached Teheran about the same time as we did. The Greeley mission was on a rush journey to Moscow, with the task of hastening the flow of American war supplies and of giving the Russians technical advice on the effective use of lend-lease material. The mission was hoping to go on at any moment, and whenever we invited Neuwirth to our mess, he always accepted with the qualification, "I will come, if I am still in Teheran."

Before long, common professional interests made Neuwirth a friend, and he became a frequent visitor to our regiment. There were also other things to bring us together. Though I had spent many fruitful years in Europe I was ignorant of America and its people. Here was a chance for some first-hand

education, and Neuwirth was happy to provide it in unlimited doses. He was ever ready to lay down the law on any subject under the sun, and generally he laid down good sound law. I liked his free and easy manners, his uninhibited candor, his knowledge of contraptions, his mastery of mechanical gadgets and his restless energy. He was always on the go. Like all of us, he had his idiosyncrasies: the absence of a handy telephone worried him, and telephones in the East are few and far between. Whenever he saw one, he pounced upon it. He would make himself comfortable, stretched out on a sofa or on the floor against a handy piece of furniture, and would make all the calls for which he had an excuse, and a few others. His usually taut face would relax with the expression of an infant enjoying an ecstatic dream. The more I saw Neuwirth, the more I was able to add to the respect for a good professional colleague the liking for a friend.

The official British and Russian policy at the time was not to show too many signs of the joint occupation in the capital city of Teheran, and persons in military uniform were allowed in the city only for special reasons. I took full advantage of such occasions to window-shop, and make small purchases to send home to Qamar and the children. The shopping center of Teheran was the narrow "Lale Zar" street, so named because it was once a shimmering meadow of tulips. Its stores were full of beautiful handmade things in the best Oriental tradition: carpets and rugs in silk and wool from the looms of nomad tribesmen, each the result of years of loving toil by an entire household; miniature paintings on paper and bone and ivory, of surpassing beauty, and of such delicacy of work that the full details could be seen only through a magnifying glass. At one place, there was a complete page of the Qurân written in graceful calligraphy on a single grain of rice. At another, there were elegant pieces of brass and silver, wrought and chased by hand. There was a tall long-necked jar of special fascination, the

creation of some unknown village craftsman who had used a rustic potter's wheel, and with inspired hands and nimble feet had put life into a lump of native clay. Hand-painted, and baked in a crude oven, it had a simple yellow motif on a turquoise background. It was a work of art, and its sublime restraint and simplicity breathed an air of immortality.

Then one afternoon, when I was least expecting it, I was hurriedly wakened in the middle of my siesta by Maula Bux. "Please get up, sahib," he said urgently. "You are wanted at once at the British Embassy."

Fifteen minutes later we drove in through the imposing gates of the high-walled British Embassy. A captain with the distinctive arm band worn by officers of the commander in chief's staff was waiting for me.

"Please follow me, sir," he said. "General Lane is holding a conference in the room of the military attaché. You are to join it at once."

The general gave me a friendly handshake and asked a few polite questions. In a little while he motioned me to a chair, put out his cigarette, pushed aside his afternoon tea tray and replaced the conversational smile on his face with a serious look. All others in the room settled down with their pencils and notebooks on their knees.

"Gentlemen," said the general, "I have come up from General Headquarters at Baghdad to set up 'Operation Pole-Evac.' You will recall the earliest days of the war and the unequal fight of the Poles, first against Hitler, and then against the Russians, who captured vast numbers of prisoners. One group of over two hundred thousand Poles has been held for the last three years in this area."

The general turned to a map on the wall, and circled with his finger around parts of Soviet Central Asia. He looked intently at the map for a few moments, then turned toward us again and continued. "Now, of course, the Poles and the Rus-



sians are not enemies, but allies in our common war against the Germans. Many Poles are already fighting on the eastern front. But the problem on that front is not shortage of manpower; it is the shortage of arms and supplies. It has therefore been decided that the Poles now in Soviet Central Asia will be brought to the Middle East and formed into new armies to reinforce us. But many problems intervene. The distances are long; communications are primitive. As you know, there is little peacetime trade or travel along this route."

The general paused briefly, and when he resumed his talk, there was an unmistakable twinkle in his eyes.

"This Polish evacuation will be a lot of fuss and bother; it is going to be the devil. But there is also a silver lining. Along with the soldiers, there will be thousands of Poles of the fair sex too."

The major on my right instantly stopped his doodling, and his slumping body snapped erect against the back of his chair. The captain on my left dropped his notebook and pencil. There was a broad grin on every face, and all the tenseness evaporated in a moment.

This looked good, and I put in my bid at once. "Sir, mine is the only medical unit in this area, and we do not have a single nursing sister. I should be allowed to select and keep sufficient Polish women from the earliest arrivals. We can train them ourselves."

Everyone looked at me enviously, but the general refused to commit himself. "I see your point," he said, "but such things can be worked out later. There are other shortages too. For example, at General Headquarters we have no stenographers."

The general went back to the map, and pointed to the southwest corner of the Caspian Sea. "This is the port of Pahlevi, two hundred miles from Teheran on a dirt road. The Russians will bring the Poles by railroad to the port of Krasnovodsk, and then across the Caspian to Pahlevi. On landing at Pahlevi, they

become British responsibility. Our main supply centers are a long way off in Iraq, from which Pahlevi is a difficult sixteen-day round trip. We must quickly move the Poles back nearer to our supply centers. Too many must not accumulate at Pahlevi, though we must be ready to deal with any hold-ups."

Now came the stage of individual discussion. Each of those present was told his responsibility in detail. I was alternately fascinated and frightened. I felt I was a piece in a human jigsaw puzzle, and that if I made any mistake the thing would no longer fit. This was my first important assignment since getting unexpected promotion from major to lieutenant colonel, and I was as worried as an unprepared student at his final examination. But there was a heartening note of confidence in the general's tone; he seemed to have thought of everything. And those others, now sitting on my right and left, and with whom I would be working, were friendly and competent people who would see me through wherever I needed help.

The ranking officer at Pahlevi was to be Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Ross. We were already good friends. Ross came from a family of distinguished Oriental scholars, and knew the Middle East and Eastern Europe. He spoke many languages, including Polish and Russian. In World War I he had served in this same area of the Caspian Sea, as part of DUNSTERFORCE, which was a hastily organized British attempt to defeat the infant Bolshevik Revolution in the Caucasus. Ross's fascinating stories of his DUNSTERFORCE days were in the best traditions of *The Arabian Nights*, with the added thrill of authenticity. He seemed to have gone about riding camels, donkeys, mules and horses; with saddlebags full of gold sovereigns. This was his only way of getting food for the troops—when it could not be plundered from the enemy—as local currencies, like local governments, kept changing with unpredictable frequency. It was an exhilarating story; only the end was disappointingly tame. Brave and fearless where the Bolsheviks were concerned, DUNSTERFORCE

was compelled to retreat before a lowly foe called dysentery.

The important question about Pole-Evac was this: What would be the peak number of Poles in Pahlevi at any one time? This depended on how fast the Russians brought them, and how fast our transport moved them to the rear areas. On both these points there was some uncertainty.

The road out of Pahlevi was a narrow dirt track, and no one knew how it would stand up to heavy traffic or bad weather. We had about a hundred lorries, and for the distances involved, these would take away about two thousand Poles a day, when things went well.

The Russians had said that once the evacuation began, about five thousand Poles would land every day. Fortunately, this was considered impossible by our intelligence staff. There was only a single-track, low-capacity railroad into Krasnovodsk. The Soviet merchant fleet on the Caspian Sea was small and even with the whole of it on the Pahlevi-Krasnovodsk run, the Russians could not carry more than a quarter of the numbers they had promised. This was a great relief, since otherwise the bottleneck out of Pahlevi would inevitably lead us into rapid chaos.

Soon General Lane was addressing me: "Ata-Ullah, the medical side will be your responsibility, and you will be hard pressed. Our medical services are badly stretched out in the battle areas of the Western Desert. I can get you no reinforcements. Do the best with what you have already got."

"Can I at least hope, sir, that all these Poles will generally be in good health?" was my embarrassed comment.

"I am afraid I cannot be definite," replied the general. "We did ask the Russians about their health, but we got no reply. Like millions of others in Russia, these Poles have probably been getting insufficient food. The possible effect on their health you can judge for yourself. There are vague reports of some typhus fever, though presumably no one will travel while actively suffering from such a disease."

I was asked about my existing resources, and it was agreed that they were small. Including me, we had nine doctors; our enlisted men were mostly litter bearers. As the normal function of my regiment was only to give first aid or emergency treatment, we were not equipped or staffed to take continuous care of patients. At Pahlevi we would need a hospital, and until one could be brought up, I asked for more doctors. My plea was brushed aside with a courteous smile. "I know all that," said the general. "You may expect more medical supplies shortly, and in the meantime I give you unlimited authority to buy anything you want urgently and can find in Teheran and Pahlevi. Use local resources; improvise; but do not waste your breath in asking for more doctors. War is war."

## CHAPTER IX

### *Pahlevi*

BY NOON on the following day, I was ready to leave for Pahlevi with Maula Bux and Shambhu Ram, my personal driver. The rest of the regiment would move up later. On the way I had to pick up at the British Embassy a permit for travel into the zone of Russian occupation. Also, I wanted to use the authority given me by General Lane to buy ten thousand hair clippers.

What worried me most about Pole-Evac was typhus, a dread disease with no effective cure. It is an ever-present danger when overcrowded people do not have enough clothing changes, and lack washing and bathing facilities. It is very infectious, and once out of hand it spreads like a prairie fire, often decimating entire populations. It is carried from person to person by lice, which under such conditions grow up by the million in the clothes and hair of helpless, unwilling human hosts. If the Poles did bring in typhus, our most desperate need would be to get rid of their lice at once. This was before the days of DDT, and I wanted to give a pair of hair clippers to each arriving family and request them to put these to vigorous use. But unfortunately my sortie in the Lale Zar petered out at a miserable seventeen pairs, and the combined efforts of the regiment did not buy us more than one per cent of our needs.

Having cleared Teheran of hair clippers, we proceeded to the British Embassy. The pass from the Russians had not arrived, but after some frantic telephoning I was told to go on without the pass. The Russians assured us that their commanders on

the route had orders to let us go to Pahlevi. I did not like this much. However, there was no alternative but to go on.

Through a pleasant afternoon, we rattled along the unpaved road at good speed. The sun was about to set when Shambhu Ram jerked to a halt in front of a wooden gate that barred the road. A little way beyond was a ramshackle hut built out of scrap wood, which had obviously come from packing cases that had done their duty. On the dull red horizon about a mile ahead floated the dust and smoke of a calm evening in a country town. This was Qazvin, our destination for the day. Near the hut, rifle in hand, stood a sentry. He now bent low, crossed under the barrier and strolled over to us. For the first time in my life I was face to face with a Russian soldier.

This was a momentous historic occasion. It was the first meeting of representatives from the 22nd Indian Medical Regiment with a live ally from the unknown land of Communism. I felt curious about how Maula Bux and Shambhu Ram would behave, and I half expected them to jump out of their seats and hug the Russian in welcome. But there was something cold and forbidding about the aspect of the ally which must have given them second thoughts. This was just as well, for the ally was holding his rifle at the ready, his bayonet unmistakably pointing in our direction. We could indulge in hugging only at the peril of our lives.

The Russian came closer and shot a question at Maula Bux which none of us understood. In clear and precise Urdu, Maula Bux explained who we were, where we were going. Shambhu Ram repeated the same information in broken English. None of this made the slightest impression on our ally.

The conversation now deteriorated into sign language. My companions tried to convey the idea that I was a high-ranking officer of the British forces on important business. They used an impressive variety of gestures, but to no purpose. The Russian replied with only one gesture; he kept waving us back in

the direction from which we had come. The only word he used often enough to register on us was "nyet."

When the futile gesturing reached a stalemate our ally had a brain wave. He called out one of his comrades, and after a lengthy discussion the two agreed on how to deal with us. They would telephone their local commander and ask for instructions.

As time went by and no instructions were received, I began to be disturbed. What if the local commander also had asked for instructions from his own superiors? There was no knowing how high our case would go, and I had no desire to spend the night on the roadside.

So I got out and walked over to the match-box hut. Looking as indignant as possible I pointed to my watch, and shook my fists furiously at the gates to indicate that I was immediately going into Qazvin. This produced more telephoning, but was soon followed by results. The gates were opened, and one of the soldiers indicated that he would accompany us to the Russian headquarters in the town.

The solitary hotel in Qazvin was the military command post. The commander was a handsome young captain with Caucasian features, who stood up to receive me, obviously out of his depth, very embarrassed, almost scared.

"Please sit down, general," he said through an interpreter.

Maula Bux and Shambhu Ram's pantomime language had clearly been a little too effective in putting across my high rank, and I did not disabuse the captain. "You have caused me serious delay," I shouted. "I demand an explanation of this behavior toward an allied officer on important duty."

He explained that he had no information about my coming. "Please, general, be good enough to rest for the night in my room. In the meantime, I will ask for instructions."

"After the treatment that I have received I really ought to refuse your hospitality," I answered. "But maybe it is not your fault, so I will accept the offer."

He gave orders for my luggage to be brought into the hotel. While waiting for that to be done, I told him of my assignment. I asked if he knew Pahlevi, and could tell me what facilities we would find there. He was sorry, but he was not allowed to answer any questions. I asked if I could go into the town for a little shopping. He said I would first have to tell him what I wanted to buy. I wanted to buy a hundred pairs of hair clippers. He was sorry, but this was most unusual, and beyond his authority. I must make the request in writing, so that he could get instructions from his superiors. Before I could worry him any more, he sent the interpreter away.

I was in effect a Russian prisoner. In the brightly lit verandah outside my room an armed sentry paced up and down all night. I amused myself with the thought that I was spending a free night in the only decent room in the hotel. It was a cheap hotel, and a modest bill would be presented to me the next morning. But I would put that bill in the lap of the Russian captain, and on the grounds that we had been under arrest, I would refuse to pay.

The interpreter came early next morning and said that we were free to go on to Pahlevi, but that on arrival there we must first report to Major Kadimoff, the local Russian commander.

The rest of the journey was uneventful. Soon we began getting out of the dry central Persian plateau to descend gradually into a greener countryside. The last few miles ran through swampy, low-lying country, well-known throughout the Middle East for its high-quality rice. The Gilan rice is much in demand for cooking the exotic varieties of pilaf, a dish that has the place of honor on the table of an Oriental gourmet. Soon we had our first glimpse of the Caspian. I now recalled from my schoolday knowledge, and passed on the information to Maula Bux and Shambhu Ram with a very superior air, that on the Caspian coast we were eighty feet below sea level. Their spontaneous incredulous response was, "Oh no, sahib"; and they took a quick



look around to reassure themselves that no immediate danger was involved.

My first sight of Pahlevi was depressing; it was even smaller and more ramshackle than I had imagined. The one thing of significance that we saw as we drove in was a small walled-in factory called Iranryba, widely known for its good caviar. In the center of the town we stopped to inquire about Major Kadimoff, and found that we were right below his headquarters.

A clumsy soldier in shabby uniform led me up a dingy flight of stairs to some mud-plastered rooms built above a shop. One of these rooms overlooked the street; it had a balcony from where one could see Pahlevi in its entire length and breadth. Occupying that point of vantage was Major Kadimoff, the master of all he surveyed.

On hearing our footsteps he came back into the room, shook me by the hand and said, "Salamo-Alaikum." This is Arabic for "Peace be with you," and is the salutation of Muslims to each other the world over. I was surprised at this from a Communist, but was, nevertheless, glad to meet a fellow Muslim.

Kadimoff knew of the Polish evacuation, and I briefly explained my own place in it. "My resources are very limited," I said, "and you and the Persian medical people must help in every possible way. This is a common problem, not only for humanitarian reasons, but also because none of us can afford an epidemic."

"I have been assured that the British are taking care of all that," he replied. "There is little that I can do anyhow. A Persian doctor is already here specially for this purpose, but how much help he can give I do not know. You should meet him."

I found Kadimoff polite and courteous. I knew that official Russian policy required him when dealing with me to remain distant and inscrutable, but his frank smile encouraged the hope that he was more human than the captain in Qazvin. Even

after business had concluded in the strict sense, we continued talking of other things in our halting Persian, and Kadimoff made no effort to get rid of me. When I was emboldened to ask personal questions, he cheerfully met my inquisitiveness.

"What part of Russia do you come from?" I asked.

"My family belong to a small town in Azerbaijan in the Caucasus. Possibly you have never heard of that part of the world before."

"On the contrary," I assured him—and he burst out laughing when I explained further—"I heard of the Caucasus before I learned the name of my own country. The Caucasus is peopled only by fairy princesses according to our childhood tales, and all my life I have longed to get there. To meet a real Caucasian, even though of the wrong sex, is an historic occasion for me."

"You must visit us after the war," he suggested. "But I do not promise to show you any fairies, and princesses are no longer welcome in our country."

The Persian doctor was glad, almost grateful to see me. He had been rushed to Pahlevi in a hurry with only a vague idea of what he was to do. Finding a sympathetic professional colleague he readily unburdened his woes. "I have been given no staff," he explained bitterly, "so what can I do here anyway?" "Nothing," I agreed. I then suggested that he pool his resources with mine, and let me take over the local hospital. "Gladly," he said. "Perhaps I will then be allowed to go back."

The hospital was a small well-built place, with room for about twenty patients. It was surrounded by spacious open lawns. But there were no patients, no equipment, no staff. The Persian doctor was glad to give me immediate possession of the empty hospital, and also of the open lawns as a campsite for my medical regiment. We then went round the whole town, but found little of any use either for love or money. My only luck was to find two establishments with running hot water, and I eagerly signed them up for exclusive use during the Polish evacuation. One was

the small solitary Turkish bath of the town, and the other was the shower room of the caviar factory. Apart from some office rooms no buildings were available. The arriving refugees would have to stay on the open beaches until they could move out.

Three days later, late at night, I received a message from Kadimoff that the first shipload of Polish refugees was due at Pahlevi at dawn. About an hour before its expected arrival, I walked down to the jetty where she was to berth. An oppressive thick mist lay over the waters, and billowing waves of the fog were rolling in from the sea toward the swampy anchorage for fishing boats further inland. The jetty was without any shelter; it was only a paved, open space with some wet wooden benches here and there. I walked over to the corner where my medical regiment had set up a first-aid post to take care of anyone who might have fallen ill on the voyage from Krasnovodsk.

Someone spread out a blanket on one of the benches and invited me to sit down. A few minutes later a thickset figure wrapped in a greatcoat appeared out of the mist and came in my direction. This was Ross. He joined me on the bench.

"I have good news for you," he said. "The chief of the Polish medical services is on board this ship. His name is General Szarecki. I knew him well when I was in Warsaw, where he had a great reputation. He is sure to be bringing many doctors and other medical staff with him, and we can let them take care of their own sick. They will need your advice on local conditions and your help in emergencies; but generally you should have an easy time."

"That is good," I replied. "I feel much relieved. Do we know now how many refugees will come in today, and how many of them will need urgent medical care?"

"No, we can't be sure of anything until they are here. We have scanty information, as the Russians have chosen to tell us little. But we shall know as soon as the first Poles come in."

We talked awhile of a few other things, and then lapsed into drowsy silence. This was suddenly broken by a splash. "That must be a sea gull waking up and looking for its breakfast," remarked Ross.

"From what I can smell it seems to have fished out a stale dinner," I replied, for I had become conscious of a peculiar unpleasant smell in the air.

Ross sniffed and agreed. I tried hard to place the smell, but could not put a name to it. To catch it better, I turned in the direction of the splash, which had seemed somewhere in the swamp. But I found that the smell was coming from the opposite side, from the direction of the open sea.

I walked over to the first-aid post. "What is this bad smell?" I asked. "Are there any foul sweaty clothes lying about? We must do something about it at once. We must find where this smell comes from."

"That's what we have been asking ourselves," replied one of the soldiers. "It seems like a putrefied dead body."

"More like the stink from a bad latrine," suggested another.

The smell was increasing. It seemed to be a mixture of many different odors, all intensely foul. Soon it had become unbearable.

Someone suddenly announced that the Russian ship was in the harbor, and would be coming alongside any moment. By now a few other persons had also arrived at the jetty: Kadimoff as the guardian of law and order; the Persian doctor to see that none of the refugees brought in infectious disease; some Polish officers to welcome their compatriots; a representative of the American Red Cross; some officers and men of Ross's staff. Everyone was holding his nose against the foul smell. Suddenly it overpowered me. I felt a writhing upheaval in my stomach, and my legs began quivering from weakness. I was just able to reach a corner of the first-aid post, where I vomited violently.

I was brought round from my misery by a loud chanking of

chains, and looking up in the bleak light of that misty dawn, I saw that the dimly lighted ship was alongside. It was a tanker. Its open top deck and all other space were packed with people standing shoulder to shoulder with hardly any room to move. They were mostly men, but there were women and children too, and also babies in arms. Their clothes were tattered, their shoulders drooping, their heads bowed, their ashen faces shriveled, drawn and silent; they were the picture of utter and abject misery. I do not know what I had expected, but I was aghast at that sight. Here was the source of those foul and revolting odors which had puzzled us. Here was a mass of humanity, filthy, diseased, exhausted, utterly broken.

Someone tried to raise a cheer in welcome, but it only sounded a discordant note in that atmosphere of stark tragedy. There was not even a feeble response from the exhausted multitude on the ship. Their lusterless eyes in their sunken sockets looked at us without any show of interest. I felt like a dumb, helpless, weary spectator at a funeral who wants to run away, but does not have the courage to defy appearances. I tried to withdraw myself from those unbearable sights and smells, and to think of other things. But one thought returned again and again to my mind: my own immediate responsibility toward these people. My medical regiment had been sent to Pahlevi to look after them. I had been anxious to find out how many sick persons we would have to care for, and so far I had got no reliable information. Now the plain, unmistakable answer was staring me in the face. Every one of these refugees was sick, in mind and in body. Every one of them would need prolonged medical care. If this shipload was a sample of what was to follow, it was quite beyond the worst that I had expected. We would be overwhelmed.

"This is terrible," I heard Ross say softly at my side. "I do not know how you are going to cope with it."

"Nor do I," was my despairing reply.

"The second ship is due in a few hours," he went on, "and the Russians want the first one emptied quickly. We must make some immediate plans to deal with the situation."

"Yes, we must," I agreed. "Give me half an hour to recover from this shock, and to think things out. After that let us meet with Szarecki and get all the details. I greatly fear that we have a serious epidemic on our hands."

I walked back to the grounds of the small local hospital where my medical regiment was in camp. It was a relief merely to get away from the close neighborhood of the ship, though there was no escape from that foul smell, which was now everywhere. As soon as I entered my tent, I felt an irresistible desire to scrub and wash myself. And then for my pent-up fears and anxieties, I sought comfort in a long and anguished prayer.

General Szarecki was a distinguished-looking person, beyond middle age, of medium height, with a shock of gray hair on his large round head and a thick silver mustache on his upper lip. His worn-out uniform hung loose on his lean, wasted body, and his sallow complexion bore witness to the hard times through which these refugees must have passed. But there was a fire in his eyes which showed clearly that his spirit had not been broken. Troubles and sorrows had only heightened the dignity of his bearing.

Szarecki soon confirmed my worst fears. "We had epidemics of typhus and dysentery at all the camps at which we have stayed," he told us. "We have suffered these epidemics for the past four or five months. Conditions were such that we were able to do nothing to stop them."

My heart sank as I asked him the questions uppermost in my mind: "But I hope you have left behind those who were suffering from such diseases at the moment. The Persians would not like any epidemics introduced into their country."

"I am afraid it was impossible to leave anyone behind," answered Szarecki in a melancholy voice. "We had to bring out

everyone, young or old, sick or well. The Russians insisted on that. As for us Poles ourselves, it was clearly now or never; and none of us was willing to remain behind. This is like the exodus of Israel from Egypt. We decided not to leave behind even women in childbirth, even men on their deathbeds. Everyone had to move with his group."

Szarecki then told us of the tortures suffered on the journey. It was generally known that conditions in the Polish camps inside Russia had always been bad. That matters became worse when the most productive parts of the country were overrun by the advancing German armies was understandable. But I found the inhuman story of that journey out of the Soviet Union, as now related by Szarecki, cruel and grim beyond belief.

"The first part of the journey was by railroad. For this we had open cattle trucks, where everyone was given standing room only. The trucks were packed until there was no room to move. Personal belongings were not allowed beyond what could be carried by hand. Food, water and toilet arrangements were almost nonexistent, even though in some cases the train journey lasted over two days. Many had to go on board this tanker straight from the cattle trucks, with no chance for any rest or wash or sleep. The sea journey was a never-to-be-forgotten nightmare. Here again there was no more than standing room, but as we were packed more tightly, the feeling of being strangled and suffocated was worse than in those cattle trucks. Many were continuously seasick; and they could do nothing but vomit where they stood. Those who had the strength and the will to struggle got to the edge of the deck to answer the calls of nature, but few had that much strength. In that worse than animal existence, it was impossible to keep up human decencies, and soon the place was solid with urine, faeces and vomit. Many found the stink of filth and the stench of disease unbearable and fainted. At least they found temporary deliverance, though it was impossible to do anything for them. They stayed where

they were, often held up in their sagging unconscious state by the pressure of human bodies around them. Eighty out of every hundred are so ill that they need long hospital care. And there are many emergencies. Two women have had abortions, one has given birth to a living baby during the journey. There were two deaths from typhus, and about ten persons seem too far gone to be saved unless you can do something for them quickly. Ship after ship is to follow us, until two hundred thousand Poles are landed in Pahlevi. They will all be in the same condition."



## CHAPTER X

### *Maulee and the Vaccine*

MY HEART SANK at this fearsome responsibility and I did not even know where to begin. But I knew there was no escape. The urgent need was to stop the epidemic by isolating all the Poles until they could be examined one by one. Szarecki confirmed my worst fears: that everyone was infested with lice, both on their bodies and in their clothes. We would have to get them clean, and into new clothes. What they wore now were mere rags; these must immediately be burned. Fortunately, Ross had good supplies of soldiers' uniforms and blankets. With good discipline and a twenty-four-hour working day at the Turkish bath and the factory shower room, we might avert a bad disaster.

"How about the seriously ill?" asked Ross, putting into words the question that I was dreading.

I felt like a criminal, but I could give only one answer. "Many patients were brought to hospital straight from the jetty," I explained. "More followed soon afterward. When the beds were gone, we put them on litters in the corridors. When the corridors were full, we moved the Indian soldiers out of their tents and turned the tents into wards. Even they are full. We have now closed the hospital to everyone."

"Even to a person on the point of death?" asked Ross incredulously.

"Yes," I said sorrowfully. "But in a day or two, when General Szarecki has reinforced us by his available doctors and nurses, things may be better. Even then we must select the patients whom we can hope to really help." The fact was that we had to

set up priorities, and those beyond help had to be allowed to die peacefully in some corner of the beach.

I remember few details of the next twenty-four hours. For the whole of that period, every officer and man of the medical regiment was continuously on his feet, continuously at work. Until the arrival of the first Polish ship, typhus had been primarily a name to most of us. Neither I, nor any of the other doctors at Pahlevi, had seen more than an occasional case of the disease, and then always in the organized safety of special infectious-disease wards. I now recalled my first contact with typhus as a medical student and found myself gripped with fear. I had read up on the disease again, but the latest literature also showed frightening gaps in the scientific understanding of the disease. It could take different forms with many variations in signs and symptoms. It could fell you suddenly, but it could equally creep up on you insidiously from minor beginnings. A harmless itch, a pain or ache anywhere in the body, the mildest fever or cold, and your imagination ran wild with fear if typhus was about. No cure was known. All that the doctors could do was to deaden the sufferings and the pains while the disease ran its unyielding, unpredictable course.

By the time of Pahlevi, however, a preventive vaccine had been produced which was believed to confer a useful though not a high degree of immunity. Unfortunately our supplies were small. After Ross and the key members of his staff had received their injections, there was only enough for about a quarter of the personnel of the medical regiment. I discussed this at an officers' meeting, and invited views on who in the regiment would run the greater risks. There was no agreement. This was not surprising, and since all of us would be in great enough peril there seemed little point in making fine distinctions. So the sickening, agonizing decision about who would receive that injection and who would go without it was left to me.

My own mind was quickly made up, and I gave necessary in-

structions to Fazal Elahi. "You must announce at evening roll call that some vaccine has arrived," I told him. "Explain that we do not have enough for all of us. Repeat the orders already issued about rigid personal precautions, and emphasize that antilouse discipline is a matter of life and death. Then invite anyone who thinks that his own duties involve an abnormal risk to take advantage of the added protection of the vaccine. Tell them that they can come individually to the medical inspection room between nine and twelve tomorrow and get the injection."

"What if too many turn up, sir?" asked the officer in charge of the inspection room.

"Act on first come, first served, or draw lots if you wish," I replied.

But I knew that he need not have been anxious. In the actual event only three sepoys took advantage of the offer. It would have been wrong not to use the vaccine, and we drew lots to decide who were to be forced to take it. I drew a blank myself. But there was a sudden complication when Maula Bux, who was luckier in the draw, refused to take his injection and insisted that I receive it in his place. I was deeply moved. "Don't be silly, Maulee," I told him, almost choking. "I run no risk, as I shall mostly work in the office, and there is ten times more change of clothes and hot water for me than for you. Your risk is real. Besides, this is a matter of military discipline. Go and get your injection."

But Maula Bux was adamant. I talked to him first with military curtness, then in anger and then in an appeal not to embarrass me. He made no reply as he heard me out in silence, with his gaze steadfastly fixed on the ground. His first word on the subject was the last, and that one tantalizing, embarrassing bottle of vaccine lay on my table until the next day, when the situation was saved by a request for it from the Persian doctor.

Szarecki, it soon became clear, would not be able to reinforce us much. He sent us a few doctors and nurses, but they were

semi-invalids themselves. They would be part patients and part staff, and I invited them to decide for themselves how they could best serve their sicker countrymen. That the medical regiment would carry the burden practically unaided in that crucial early stage was doubly sad; it dimmed my hopes for a quick stop to the epidemic, it lessened the chance of succor for those already in the grip of the plague. I felt cornered, trapped and desperate.

And then, suddenly, a merciful providence blanked out Pahlevi from my mind, and I was deep in the vivid recollection of the scene that had taken place six months ago at the railroad station of Qadian. Father seemed to be again with me, holding me in his loose embrace. I was bending low for his kiss; he was telling me that God never turns down a cry in distress. Surging through my mind was that familiar passage from the Holy Book: "When My servants ask about Me, tell them that I am always near. I answer the supplicant whenever he calls Me, only let him do My bidding and have faith in Me, so that he may be rightly guided."

Father had a simple philosophy about the place of prayer in the scheme of things. "Do you want to know," he would ask, "how quickly God's love responds to prayer? Then let a mother tell you how fast rises the milk in her breasts when her helpless infant utters a hungry cry. No genuine prayer is fruitless, though for our own good the result is often different from our wishes. Beware of being like a child who doubts his mother's love when she holds him from the irresistible lure of the flame. There are laws of nature made immutable by divine will, but within their scope prayer can work miracles. You will ask in vain for the dead to be returned to life, but prayer may so tame the winds and waves that their own murderous fury deposits you on the shore. What you get from prayer will depend on what you take to it. Offer humility and you will find strength; offer grief and you will find solace. It will bring you peace instead of vanity in

worldly gains. At best it will lift you beyond the stars in the skies, and always it will sustain the sanity of your spirits. In your greatest trials, pray and you will find sources of inner strength that you had not even dreamed of before."

Amidst the woes of Pahlevi, the memory of that farewell scene came to me like a breath of fresh life. One instant I was baffled, desperately agitated; the next my mind was cool, my spirits calm and peaceful. No longer did I feel paralyzed and crushed. What if it seemed beyond my resources to control things properly? That was no reason why I should not meet the challenge to the utmost of my ability.

By early afternoon order began to replace the chaos both in my surroundings and in my inner self. The few hours that had passed since that grim dawn arrival of the tanker seemed like days. All that I had heard and seen in the meantime had confirmed my first tragic assessment.

The medical regiment threw itself into the work wholeheartedly, and by evening a pattern had been set which continued uninterruptedly on the beaches and streets of Pahlevi for over a fortnight. The plan was simple. Immediately on landing all the refugees were escorted to a special "dirty" camp on the beach. They were guarded like prisoners, and forbidden to go out until they had been through the cleansing process. For this we took the women and children to the Turkish bath, and sent the men to the shower room of the caviar factory. Their rags were taken away and burned, they were shorn of their hair and rid of their lice, their dirty bodies were soaked and scrubbed clean. Each person was given new blankets and a soldier's uniform and sent back to the beach to another camp. This was the "clean" camp, and here in greater liberty he waited his turn to leave Pahlevi.

Under normal conditions we should have gone further, and kept the inmates of the "clean" camp also under guard for another ten days. Many might be incubating the disease without

outward signs of it. But I decided not to attempt the impossible, and to concentrate all resources where they would be most effective. In the early stages, we had to forget those incubating the disease, just as we had temporarily steeled our hearts against those who were too ill.

Many times during that day I made the rounds of the main scenes of activity, cheering and praising and comforting and exhorting; giving a symbolic helping hand in one place and in another ordering off duty those about to drop from fatigue. Ross and his staff worked wonders in their own field. In the evening I went over to see him and to compare notes, and then together we walked over to see Kadimoff.

"Well," he asked, "is everything under control?"

"As much as it can be," I replied. "Let us go onto the balcony behind your office, and you can see what we are doing."

In the coppery twilight of the setting sun, the emerald green of the Caspian Sea had already turned to a dull gray. In front of us ran a narrow creek spanned by a modern drawbridge, which joined the two parts of the village of Pahlevi. On our side of the creek, a little way to the right, was the landing jetty with an empty ship berthed alongside. On the opposite side was a promenade with neglected flower beds and palm trees whose weird evening shadows danced in crazy patterns on the dying ripples. Far off to the right was a pall of smoke through which shone some log fires. This was the home of the Poles on the open beach. Helped by a platoon of the medical regiment, about two hundred women and children were on their slow and weary journey from the beach to the Turkish bath. The soldiers were carrying the sicker and smaller children and giving a hand to those most in need, but the straggling procession moved only at a halting, sickly pace. Every now and again one of the women would collapse on the roadside. A soldier would make her as comfortable as possible and leave her there until a litter party could be arranged.

The melancholy procession wound its way over the draw-bridge and began to disappear from sight into the narrow slum lanes of the ancient part of Pahlevi, where the Turkish bath lay. Just then a weird group emerged from the opposite direction. This was a party from the medical regiment dressed in capes, gloves and masks, and carrying large sacks on their backs. They took their loads to the creekside edge of the promenade and threw them on a large dump of similar bundles.

"What are you collecting there?" asked Kadimoff.

"The deadly clothes in which the Poles arrived here," I explained. "If you could somehow give each one the necessary dose, there is enough virus in that dump to kill every soldier in the German Army."

I think a shiver ran down his tough Caucasian spine, and from then on he became more helpful than ever. I could sense his relief when one of the soldiers poured a can of gasoline on that dump and set it ablaze.

Even though their faces were masked, I recognized many familiar figures silhouetted against the lurid smoky light of that blaze. I felt a chill of fear at the hazard which these brave friends had just run with so much unconcern. In the confused conditions of Pahlevi our best precautions must remain incomplete; mistakes must inevitably be made. Would the plague forgive our lapses; and if not, how many of us would it smite? I had to go over and reassure myself once more that no one was being careless.

For ten long days and nights the Poles poured into Pahlevi like a flood. How many were to come on any particular day was never known beforehand. One day only a hundred; on the next many thousands. There was a merciful day when no ship came at all, but there was another, which, even though years have gone by, I still recall with a shudder. On this tragic day, twelve thousand human wrecks were flung ashore. The flimsy organization

of the medical regiment broke down, and Pahlevi became a seething chaos for twenty-four hours. But powerfully aided by many of the Poles who had arrived earlier, and whose gallant spirits now gloriously burst out of the limitations of their sick bodies, we were soon in control again.

General Lane had talked of two hundred thousand Poles in Soviet Central Asia. The senior Polish officers in Pahlevi said that there were many more. But to our great surprise, on the tenth day of the evacuation Kadimoff announced that it was at an end. Only forty-three thousand Poles had reached us so far.

This caused consternation among the Poles, though my own first feeling was of great relief. Transport out of Pahlevi had been slow; thirty thousand Poles were still on our hands. Our "dirty" camp was hopelessly congested. Even with no more arrivals it would be another week before everyone could be given his first hot bath in two years, and put into clean clothes. To our sorrow and shame, the sick had been badly neglected. Many had died on the beaches and on the road during their first day's journey out of Pahlevi without being seen by a doctor.

But at last the worst was over; we were over the hump.

Soon we turned our attention to organizing and expanding the hospital. Additional equipment and supplies were now reaching us from Baghdad and we were getting increasing help from the refugee doctors and nurses. Once again we had a few empty beds. Everyone was greatly relieved; but most of all the officers and men of the medical regiment. We found ourselves caring for our patients with a deeper tenderness, perhaps in unconscious atonement for having neglected them so far.

But our resources remained limited, and we made this clear in the notice we now put up at the hospital gate. In large bold letters this was our new announcement: THIS HOSPITAL IS NOT FOR THE SICK. Tucked away underneath in small inconspicuous type was the addition, "It is only for the very sick."

The news of Pahlevi had spread fast down the line, and dis-



tinguished sightseers soon began to honor us. The "brass" had their inspections to do and their reports to make. But Pahlevi had other compensations to make up for the fatigue of that long and tiring journey.

For the gourmet there was the unlimited supply of caviar at a ridiculous giveaway price. The German armies were not far from Stalingrad at the time, and trade in Caspian caviar had come to a standstill. The Iranryba factory was happy to give us all we wanted almost for the asking. Throughout our seven months at Pahlevi we had jarfuls of caviar for every meal and ate it to our heart's content.

My own introduction to this prized delicacy was disappointing, though in due course I acquired the taste and came to enjoy it. But Pahlevi soon convinced all of us that caviar is primarily a legend born of its scarcity. Eaten in miserly thimblefuls it is a dainty treat: but on the Caspian, where we ate of it both as much and as often as the fancy took us, caviar tasted a poor second to the golden ripeness of juicy corn on the cob.

And then there was the Turkish bath. After an initial show of reluctance, each of our senior visitors would feel duty-bound to inspect this place. It was full of naked women being bathed and cleaned and scrubbed by each other and by the soldiers of the medical regiment. It remained that way day and night for a whole month, and off and on for long afterward. Whether this gave the visitors a feeling that spring was in the air, I cannot say; but to us of the medical regiment the Turkish bath was the most depressing part of the Polish evacuation. Under the impartial hands of disease and malnutrition, young and old, maiden and widow, had become macabre figures of wrinkled skin and ugly bones. To see them naked provided no erotic pleasure. The spectacle of blotch-covered bodies, sagging breasts and pendulous bellies wrung pity out of your heart when it did not revolt you.

We never found out why the evacuation came to a sudden

stop at this stage. Soon there was news of high-level negotiations with the Russians for repatriation of the Poles still remaining in Central Asia. Then we heard of an agreement that another hundred thousand Poles would come out to Pahlevi "as soon as possible." This from the Russians, hard pressed by the Germans as they were at the time, could mean a month, a year or never. And in the meantime the medical regiment was ordered to stay at Pahlevi and wait for the second evacuation.

I began learning Persian in my spare time. Closely allied to Urdu, my own native language, Persian has an even greater place in our culture and traditions than Greek in the Western world. It was the common language of Indian aristocracy for centuries, until the British replaced it with English. To my father and his contemporaries, a study of the stylish prose of Saadi, of the lyrics of Hafiz, of the mysticism of Rumi, of the *Rubāiyāt* of Omar Khayyām and of the other classics of Persian literature was an important part of a liberal education. My preoccupation with the sciences had left a gap here, and I was glad of the chance to fill it up. I talked and practiced as much as possible with the local people, and under the eager tutelage of Persian friends I made rapid progress. By the end of our stay at Pahlevi I could read and write Persian and was at home with many of its classics. I had discovered a great new world into which I have wandered at will in subsequent years to my pleasure and advantage.

But through all those months at Pahlevi there was one predominant mood, and at the back of my mind there was one constant question. The mood was a great thankfulness; my regiment had done their duty to the typhus-ridden Poles, and yet not one had fallen a victim to the disease. The question that clamored for an answer was the obvious one: was our savior the blind million-to-one chance, or was my father right and had God heard my cry in distress?

✓ I can attempt no answer. We had taken all possible care, but

in the conditions at Pahlevi not much care was possible. We did succeed in preventing a bad epidemic, but unlike us, many Persians who had less contact with the Poles got typhus and died of it. Perhaps we were more efficient than I had thought. Perhaps I had been unduly scared and had overestimated the risk. Maybe our good army health had given us immunity. Perhaps it was not a miracle, only a miraculous coincidence.

I remember arguing with my father once about a similar experience of his own: the cure of a young boy named Karim from the invariably fatal hydrophobia of dog bite. I was at college at the time, captivated body and soul by the beauty, the rigor and the remorseless logic of the scientific method. I was intolerant about accepting anything as true until proved in the same mathematical manner.

"That God listens to us, that He loves us, may well be true, father," I had said, "but where is the rigorous proof?"

"You mean in the sense in which two and two make four?"

"Exactly," I replied.

"In that sense there is no proof. But tell me, do you believe in your parents' love for you?"

"Of course, yes. What a question to ask."

"But judged by the scientific method, what is the foundation for your belief in our love? We have given you much, but we have also denied your wishes, and even punished you at times. By the impersonal standards of science everything could have happened to you just the same in a commercial orphanage."

"Oh, no," shouted my heart deep down. Outwardly I remained silent, baffled by the dilemma. For against all logic, the unproven love of my parents meant all the world to me. And despite all logic I did not much care if two and two made four or made five.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Okulicki*

A FORTNIGHT AFTER the arrival of the first Poles, I was standing at the bedside of a four-year-old boy on my daily round of the hospital.

"But isn't this the boy you were going to discharge a week ago as a complete cure?" I asked the doctor who was showing me around.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "I was sure he would have a quick convalescence, but instead he started going downhill."

"Why?"

"I cannot make out. I have consulted other medical officers, and we find no abnormality. I would like your opinion too."

I did a careful examination but found nothing. "I think he is not getting proper nutrition" was the only comment I could make, and I suggested special nursing and scarce things like orange juice.

"He is being nursed by his own mother, and is getting a very special diet," replied the doctor. Some days later the boy was dead.

The mother was heartbroken, inconsolable, dazed. A victim of slow malnutrition herself, she was frail and weak. When she set about carrying her meager belongings away from the hospital, the officer on duty asked a soldier to help her to the beach. Her only item of baggage was a dirty canvas bag, patched in many places. As the soldier picked it up with a jerk, the rotted seams gave way and the bag burst open.

With an ugly rattle a dozen tins of orange juice tumbled to the floor.

The mother had been stealing the orange juice from her own child. The discovery of her guilt shocked her back into reality like a sleepwalker caught committing a theft. She sobbed like a child, she tore her hair, she hit her head against the wall. "Kill me at once, O God," she screamed again and again.

The news was soon brought to me. I was stunned. A check showed the same thing happening to other patients. We were horrified. Chickens and eggs, hard to come by, and meant for special cases, were being eaten by the Polish doctors. Tea and sugar, issued for the sick, were found hoarded and hidden under the nurses' pillows. Blankets, stolen and sold, were recovered from some Persians who identified the original offenders as Poles working in the hospital.

Born of my army training, my first thought was of discipline and punishment. On another occasion two Indian soldiers of my regiment were similarly guilty and I did punish them. I punished them without hesitation, though not without an uneasy heart, for their lapse also showed a failure of inspiration and leadership on my part. But these errant Poles; by what standards was I to judge them? I was deeply disturbed in mind, and the more I thought it over, the more my anger gave way to sympathy.

What disease and deprivation had done to the Poles physically had been plain to us at once. But we had been blind to the deeper damage to their personalities. The great fact about man is the bond between his body and soul, but in our preoccupation with the bodies we had forgotten the souls inside. We had thought of the damaged vehicles and ignored the injured passengers.

The need for interpreters was a big handicap, but I talked to these Poles one by one, and at length. It was soon borne upon me that, but for the grace of God, not many persons would behave differently under those same conditions. The habits born of

endless months of a bleak hand-to-mouth existence, when life itself depended on stealing and hoarding at every opportune moment, could not be instantly forgotten. We had told them that from now on rations would arrive as needed, but they had heard that many times before. And when the taste of an egg and the bite of an apple have become distant memories, how do you help going crazy when you see them once again?

The few who had erred grievously were sent back to the camps on the beach. It would have been wrong to expose them again to the temptations at the hospital. To the others we gave a fortnight's rations of tea, sugar and canned goods to keep as their personal reserve. And once a week each of them was invited to eat his fill of the special things otherwise given only to the patients.

Their reaction was immediate and magnificent, and with honest hard work they made full amends. Later, we were glad to let them run the hospital themselves, helping only when they asked. In my long and varied medical career, I have never seen a more devoted and dedicated band of hospital workers than those Poles at Pahlevi.

Awkward incidents were not confined to the hospital; Ross also had his share of embarrassment. He walked into my tent one afternoon looking glum and under the weather. "I am in difficulties with Kadimoff," he announced, "and I don't quite know what to do."

"Let me use my charms on him," I suggested.

"No, this is serious. A Polish sergeant has insulted a Russian officer. On the main street, and looking the Russian full in the face, the Pole is said to have raised his extended right arm, and loudly shouted, 'Heil Hitler!'"

"Letting off steam for some real or imaginary grievance," I said.

"Maybe, but psychology will cut no ice with Kadimoff. He has

asked that we hand over the Pole to him for a military trial. And that means the firing squad."

Ross saved the situation by insisting on the privilege of punishing such high treason himself. He saw no reason for putting this burden on the great Russian allies. "Moreover," Ross explained, "the culprit is no longer here. He was arrested and sent down to Teheran by special transport to face an immediate trial. In this sort of thing, I tolerate no delay."

In the meantime, the sergeant went underground. The Russians carried out searches, and put guards on all exits, but in the fog of wartime security I never found out who won.

That sergeant's gesture was unduly dramatic, but his feelings were shared by other Poles who did not quite know whom they hated more, the Germans or the Russians. True, the war had first been unleashed on them by the Germans, but many were angered more by the Russian stab in the back that followed. Worse than bodily disease and physical suffering was this conflict in the Polish mind. Who were their greater enemies, the Nazis or the Communists? It was a question they could not forget; it was a question they could not answer. And their material suffering became a thousandfold more tragic because of this inner dilemma.

This malicious fate has haunted their last two generations, doing to many Poles what it did to Colonel Okulicki, who came with the refugees to Pahlevi. He was in his middle forties, with a great military reputation. He had led a turbulent life with enough adventure in it to satisfy twenty human beings. When sixteen years old, he left school to serve his grim apprenticeship in World War I. The next six years of his young manhood were spent fighting: first the Germans, then the Russians; openly when possible, from the underground when necessary.

After World War I, in the new armies of independent Poland, this twice-wounded, six-times-decorated officer soon made his mark. When Poland was set ablaze once more by World War II,

Okulicki was to be found where the fires were hottest. Soon Poland surrendered, but Okulicki did not; he continued his unrelenting fight from the underground for another year. Then he fell into Russian hands and endured tortures in a Moscow prison. He was set free under the Polish-Soviet agreement.

Okulicki stayed many weeks at Pahlevi, and we spent much time together. He was a kindred spirit, and both of us were keen though third-rate chess players. We talked often and long: of the life-and-death issues facing our nations; of what the war would do to us as individuals and to mankind as a whole; of Germans, Poles, Russians, Persians and Indians; of Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus and atheists; of art and science and philosophy; and of cabbages and kings. Whatever the subject, Okulicki always spoke in a gentle voice, and even his abundant humor had unmistakable sincerity. I can say little about Okulicki the soldier, but I cannot forget the clean intellect and the deep humanity of Okulicki the man.

I lost sight of the other Poles after they passed through Pahlevi, but Okulicki and I kept in touch, and I followed his fortunes, as far as was possible under war conditions. He held high rank in the Polish armies that were formed in the Middle East, fighting magnificently in the Western Desert and in Italy. When the flames of war in these areas lessened in intensity, Okulicki was given an assignment that I knew was close to his heart.

His beloved Poland was again the field of savage fighting between the retreating Nazis and the advancing Communists. True to their alliance with the Russians, and unmindful of fearful odds, the Poles had organized a home army, and Okulicki, now a general, was appointed its chief of staff. He left Italy by air one night and, after a hazardous flight over enemy-held areas, parachuted down into his native land.

Okulicki was there when the day of destiny came for Warsaw for the second time in World War II. The Germans had been



driven back to the outskirts of the city, and the liberation of the Polish capital was imminent. The home army was waiting for this moment. Dispersed and concealed in strategic positions, with supplies and stores procured with difficulty and husbanded against this day, they were ready with prepared plans. At a signal from their Russian allies, they would strike in the German rear. Caught between the Red Army and the home army, the Germans would be destroyed at small cost.

The Russians entered the suburbs of Warsaw. Their radio asked the home army to rise against the common enemy. The uprising started at once. Okulicki was in the key role, and the vigor and intensity of the Polish onslaught surprised friend and foe alike.

The Russian call had been heard round the world. There could be only one result. Poles everywhere got ready to celebrate.

Bloody battles raged between the Germans and the Poles; house to house, street by street, day and night. No quarter was given or asked. And though it seemed strange that the Russians, so near, should not be in the fight, the reason was clear. "They must reorganize before they advance again," we said. Then we became impatient, the reorganization was taking too long. We were impatient, then we were perplexed and then the unbelievable answer to the horrible enigma became all too clear.

The Russians had stopped not from necessity, but from a callous and deliberate policy.

The Russians resumed their advance sixty days later. Warsaw was a mass of ruins and rubble. Most of the Poles who could give strength and leadership to postwar Poland were dead. Okulicki was invited by the Russians to a conference and imprisoned. His subsequent fate remains unknown.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Kadimoff and the Commissar*

KADIMOFF left Pahlevi soon after the first evacuation was over. Those were the days when the difficult war situation had forced some reasonableness into official Russian policy, and Kadimoff followed that line with a correct formal attitude toward us from the beginning. We inevitably saw a great deal of him, but he did not permit us any intimacy with the rank and file of the local Russian garrison.

Within a week of our arrival there, Ross invited Kadimoff and all the Russian officers to a social function. Kadimoff came, but on obvious excuses all the others stayed away. A few days later, Kadimoff returned the hospitality by inviting us to a variety show by a visiting group of talented Cossack artistes. Other Russian officers were present, but we were not asked to meet them.

"As good children of Father Stalin, they are to be seen and not heard" was Ross's wry comment.

"Then let me handle this," I said. "I have a way with children."

"This is not a matter of handling, but of official policy. You will never get the other Russians to come to your officers' mess."

"May I try?" I asked.

"Certainly, and if you succeed, I will stand you a weekend at Ramsar." Ramsar was an exclusive seaside resort near Pahlevi.

With so much at stake, I began working on Kadimoff in earnest. There were additional considerations which made my effort to get beneath his skin a matter of absorbing interest. I

had an intellectual urge to know him well, and to weigh the appeal of Communism to its devotees against my own deep attachment to Islam. So, on the first appropriate occasion I took the bull by the horns with a bold uninhibited approach.

"I have a guilty confession to make," I said to him. "I am deeply prejudiced against Communism. But the fault is more yours than mine."

"I don't understand you" was his bewildered reply.

"As a people you have isolated yourselves from the world. So few of you travel outside your own country, and the persons that I have met who have traveled to Russia all complain of restrictions on where they could go, and whom they could talk to."

"What is wrong with that? Every country takes precautions against foreign spies."

"Of course," I replied. "But as these travelers are my only source of knowledge of Russia and Communism, you must forgive the prejudice that I have frankly admitted. However, now that I am here, you and the other Russians at Pahlevi must tell me the facts and teach me the truth."

I had no desire to indulge in controversy or to score debating points, and once Kadimoff was sure of my sincerity, I was able to ask him many questions without giving offense. I observed the simple code which I had seen practiced by my father in my childhood days at home.

Father was a devout Muslim, but among his friends were persons of other faiths, and his abounding hospitality welcomed Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims alike. Continuous strife between the different communities in the political and economic fields was a characteristic of the India of those days, with ugly religious fanaticism leading even to rioting and bloodshed in cities of mixed population. But in our house people discussed their different faiths and convictions without heat or rancor.

This was because of two simple rules of self-restraint which father stressed again and again.

"I believe in Allah, the one true God," he would explain, "but I never talk ill of the false gods that someone else may worship. If I did so, and was answered by sacrilegious abuse of Allah, the guilt would be primarily mine."

His other rule was equally simple: "In Islam I have found an answer to my spiritual longings, and the satisfaction of my deepest needs. I thankfully talk of my own experiences in the hope that I may help another yearning soul. But I avoid hostile criticism of other beliefs. That someone else is wrong will not prove that I am right."

I followed this code and eagerly searched for the good and the beautiful in Communism. Soon Kadimoff introduced me to the more learned discourses of the local political commissar. He was a young captain, very grave and very earnest, and among the Communists at Pahlevi he had the authority to lay down the party line. His knowledge of Communist dogma was profound; it had been his lifetime study. His relationship with Kadimoff was not clear. Kadimoff was the formal commander, but the political commissar, though one rank lower, held a vague power of veto over his own commanding officer. They worked in close collaboration, only the commissar had a special responsibility for the "morale" of his flock.

Intrigued by their relationship, I questioned them one day. "What happens if you disagree?"

"Why should we disagree?" was the prompt reply. "Our objectives are common."

"But even on common objectives, there must sometimes be an honest difference of opinion. That is only human."

They did not think so. I could only suppose that even human nature differs from country to country.

"What progress with Kadimoff?" Ross would ask every now and again with an amused smile.

"I am getting on, and the Russians will come to our mess one day," I would reply. "Don't forget your promise about Ramsar."

I threw many tentative invitations at Kadimoff, but his replies were always evasive. I wooed the political commissar in case he held the veto in such matters, also without success. I tried other ways of breaking the ice. We officers were the hated bourgeois to them, but the Russian comrades might thaw at a chance of meeting the "oppressed and exploited" Indian sepoy. I proposed a game of football, but there was no response. I sought light from Maula Bux.

"Why have you not made friends with any of the Russian soldiers here?" I asked him.

"I have tried, sahib," he replied, "but it is no use. Many of them want to be friendly, but they say that they would be punished if they were seen with us."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Their orders, sahib," he explained, adding as an afterthought, "They must be ashamed of their uniforms and poor living conditions."

Whatever the reasons, the weekend at Ramsar continued to elude me until the eve of Kadimoff's departure from Pahlevi. And then it fell into my lap almost without asking.

The political commissar was present when Kadimoff made the announcement, "I leave Pahlevi next week."

"The best of luck wherever you go," I said. "We shall miss you." And on the spur of the moment I turned to the commissar. "We ought to give a joint farewell party to the major. Let us do it at our officers' mess."

"A good idea" was his unexpected reply. "Can you do it tomorrow?"

Of course we could.

It was a rollicking gay party; everybody was in a boisterous mood from the start. Even the commissar behaved like a normal

person. An international team of cooks had prepared dishes with their own particular appeal to the Russians, the Poles, the Persians, the Americans, the British and the Indians among us. There were exotic pilafs, colorful salads, spiced curries, a dozen kind of meats, each with a sauce of suitable aroma to go with it, delicious sweets done up in artistic shapes and caviar and salmon in choice varieties with the special compliments of the Iranryba factory. On a large table in the corner were bottle after bottle of that curse of modern man, alcohol, in many seductive forms and in quantities that would not only drown sorrows for the evening, but would guarantee a headache for days.

"Speech, speech," said someone as the meal progressed. As the senior host, I had to make a beginning.

"In our country," I said, "we have special customs about the giving of hospitality and about receiving it. The guest is honor-bound to let himself go, he must relax completely. And our custom permits the host to name the test of the relaxation. May I exercise that privilege?"

"Certainly, certainly" was the enthusiastic response.

"It is a foolproof test," I continued. "Any guest still sober enough at midnight to walk straight will have let us down. Those whom we have to carry to their rooms will have done us the most honor."

Generally the Russians proved good guests. The political commissar passed the test with flying colors at the head of the class. As a practicing Muslim, I could touch no alcohol, but I did not need any artificial stimulus to enjoy myself thoroughly.

Major Kadimoff's place at Pahlevi was taken by Lieutenant Colonel Kirev. Kirev was a pure Russian, with a distinguished service career. For his gallantry in action, he had earned high military honors and had been decorated by Stalin in person. He had done equally well in the more rewarding struggle for advancement inside the Communist party, where he now held a

high position. To the Russians in Pahlevi, he was a demigod, whose presence there was a matter of pride and honor for them.

Eminence sat lightly on Kirev's shoulders. He carried himself with the ease, assurance and dignity of an aristocrat of the bluest blood. He took his privileges for granted; he did not hide them and he did not parade them. He was neither haughty nor apologetic, and he set a new tone of frankness at Pahlevi.

An occasional Russian soldier was able to come to our lines, and we were able to return the visits. The austere office behind the balcony was no longer the only place where we could meet the local Russian commander. I often went to Kirev's private quarters and saw the plentiful luxury in which he lived, and the attention and comfort which he demanded and got from his soldier servants.

The climax of my good fellowship with the Russians was a private dinner given by the commissar. He was in a confident mood and we were soon having a heated argument. He asserted that Communism would become world-wide in ten years and endure in a manner without parallel in history. I granted the contemporary impact of Communism, but considered it only a minor upheaval in the historical perspective. It did not have the stamp of something that could move men deeply for centuries.

"You are prejudiced," shouted the commissar. "Do you deny the Russian people's devotion to Communism?"

"No one can deny that," I said, "especially after the battles of Moscow and Stalingrad. But much of that devotion is apparent rather than real; rooted in the hope of quick gain or the fear of swift punishment; the result of rigid state control of education and environment. You have a seductive battle cry: 'Workers of the world, unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains.' But your achievement is only this: that sparked with a slogan, the Russian workers overpowered their guards and broke prison. Numbers were on your side, a thousand to one. The chains were

rusty, the prison walls shaky; for don't forget that the forces of social justice were already on the march in other parts of the world. Lenin voiced their thoughts, but the workers followed their own animal instinct of self-interest. This was no revolution, except in the sense that a lot of blood was spilled."

"Are you blind to the political and economic concepts of Communism?" asked the commissar in anger. "Even our enemies admit that they are revolutionary. That they give the proletariat control over its own destiny does not lessen their revolutionary greatness. I suppose the battle cry of your revolution would be this: 'Men and women everywhere, tighten your chains, they are getting loose!'"

"Yes," I replied. "That is the battle cry of true revolutionaries like Moses and Jesus and Mohammad. They curb our animal instincts, they do not exploit them. They reveal new moral truths, each of which is a new chain of inner self-discipline. Opposed by universal anger and resentment, ridicule and violence, they undertake the revolutionary task of changing men's hearts; not the easy task of changing men's environment. And see the result. Today Islam has lost its novelty, it has no worldly empire, no material temptations to offer, it wields no secret weapons of terror, it cannot isolate its followers from other creeds and philosophies; and yet, if you had the eyes, you would see a hundred million Muslims in different corners of the globe bowed in spontaneous prayer at this very moment. They are on parade to glorify their Lord, and in comparison with this one moment alone, all the parades and rallies and marches and counter marches of the whole history of Communism put together amount to an insignificant pantomime. Time alone will show how long Communism will endure, but this solemn homage to Islam has been rendered five times a day for thirteen centuries."

"That proves nothing," said the commissar, "except that men used to be ignorant and gullible. In this age of enlightenment



men's minds work differently." We went on to discuss what was enlightened and what was not, but the same words had different meanings for him and for me. Fortunately, on the really important issue of the evening we were in agreement. It was a good dinner.

In the words and example of Kirev, Kadimoff and the commissar, I searched for the good and the beautiful in Communism, diligently and long. I searched in vain. I found it a creed based on hatred of others, concerned only with material values; ever anxious to malign with flimsy or perverted logic, ever ready to ignore or twist facts to suit its own convenience. Without having been there, the Communist knows all that is wrong with your home town, and if you disagree, you only prove yourself unreasonable. His own country is a veritable heaven on earth, and you must take his word for it, without the impertinence of wanting to see for yourself. He has his special versions of history, of science, of economics. These you must not question, these are his axioms. Grant him these, and he will build you a Godless, soulless philosophy that will leave life not worth the living.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Barnardo's*

OUR STAY at Pahlevi, as we waited for the second evacuation, was pleasant, though we had a guilty feeling at being away from the hub of things. Momentous events were happening elsewhere. In the Western Desert there were exciting, fast-moving battles of a new type. The invincible Germans, having come all the way across Europe, were knocking at the gates of the Caucasus, and their advance toward the Persian Gulf was beginning to threaten the oil supplies of the Western Allies. This forced a change in the earlier policy that British troops should generally be kept out of Persia, and we heard that large formations had moved in close to Teheran.

The hard-pressed Russians were in desperate need of war supplies, and while these were available from their American allies in an ever-mounting flood, both the Atlantic and Pacific approaches to Russia had been made perilous by the war as it had developed. Russia was nearly isolated, and it became imperative to utilize to the full the still-open route across the Indian Ocean and the Persian mainland. But this Persian route was primitive; its ports of poor capacity, its highways narrow and unpaved, its single-track railroad short of rolling stock and locomotives. So, to develop and expand this line of communication came soldiers of a new type, wearing uniforms not often seen before in these parts. These were the Americans, and their arrival was the unrealized beginning of a new force in the destiny of the Middle East.

Pahlevi also began to witness new activity. Its port, mostly

empty since it had received that cargo of shattered human beings, began to fill up for traffic in the opposite direction. Convoys of trucks began arriving from the south to discharge pile after pile of load on the open jetty. There were boxes and crates and bundles of manufactured war supplies of all kinds; and in even larger quantities came the raw materials of modern warfare. One day the place would be stacked high with ingots of copper, the next day there would be ton upon ton of crude rubber. At irregular intervals, Russian ships would come unannounced and take these things away.

The medical regiment in the meantime continued hopefully and steadily at work and play. Our newly planted hospital garden prospered, giving us pleasant exercise and quiet relaxation. Old friends from units of the Indian Army, now in Teheran, came to visit us. So did Neuwirth, somehow still in Teheran, and other recently arrived Americans, many of whom became new friends. But the deep satisfaction of this period was a children's convalescent home, suggested by Ross in an inspired moment. This became an absorbing labor of love. Ross christened it *Barnardo's*, after a British philanthropic organization.

At long last, the high-level talks for evacuation of the Poles still in Soviet Central Asia must have succeeded. Excitement among Poles waiting for them at Pahlevi began to mount. There was coming and going by high "brass." A complete six-hundred-bed hospital arrived. So did elaborate "bath units" that could raise vast quantities of hot water, and everything else that could be needed.

The large staff of Polish doctors and nurses that had worked with us during the first evacuation had gone from strength to strength. The relationship between them and the medical regiment had grown into good companionship and mutual trust. Now they could render their incoming countrymen medical aid of a higher standard than we could. They would have the ad-

vantage of a common language and the bond of shared sufferings and sorrows.

So for the second evacuation I invited the Poles to take charge of their own medical arrangements, even though the official responsibility had to remain mine. In due course, the convoys of ships across the Caspian started once more. The second evacuation brought to Pahlevi over twice as many refugees as came there during the first. But this time, the Poles were doing everything for themselves, calmly, thoroughly, efficiently. Not very onerous was our part: to stand by in admiring sympathy.

Our abundant leisure was put to use at Barnardo's, which was at a restful, sheltered spot on the beach some distance away from Pahlevi. Hundreds of convalescing children from the ages of four to fourteen stayed there for varying times. They would come there with faded cheeks and drooping backs, pale, anemic and listless, their eyes dull and their faces rigid, for they had long forgotten how to smile and laugh. The food at Barnardo's was good and abundant, and if ever their childish appetite for sugar or milk or butter outran their army ration, the Indian soldiers vied with each other to give up their own share. From their meager pay, they bought the children toys and sweets, and these things came also from the Red Cross and other kindly sources.

But Barnardo's had nearly come to grief on the day of its start on the rocks of fanatical ignorance.

The accommodation was all ready, the chairs and tables were in place, and the first group of convalescents were to arrive in the evening. In the afternoon I went over to see things for myself. Fazal Elahi was hard at work in the storeroom, and from the distress on his face, I saw at once that something was wrong.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"We are in trouble, sir," he replied. "The special issue of tinned meat has come from the quartermaster. But it is all beef or pork."

"Good heavens," I said, sensing the implications. "What should we do now?"

This was serious. I felt a fool for not having foreseen it. The Barnardo kitchen and dining rooms were to be run by Indian soldiers. The Hindus among them would be horrified at the sight of beef, and the Muslims would be upset by pork, which is unclean in their religious code. How would we get the meat cooked and served; who would wash the dishes?

We talked it over. "Let us bring over some Poles from the Pahlevi hospital kitchen," suggested Fazal Elahi.

"You mean," I commented uneasily, "that we should eat our words? We have told everyone that this is to be the medical regiment's own show."

To get more advice, I sent for the other officers. Two of them were Brahmins, the most respected Hindu caste. I explained the position, and looked questioningly at them.

"You know the regiment better than we do," said one of them, "but I feel that if you gave the order, everyone will forget any religious prejudice."

"Such an order would be against the rules," I said, "but I am glad of your opinion."

I turned to the other Hindu. He also saw no reason why in the circumstances a Hindu should not work in the kitchen. All officers, Hindu and Muslim, agreed.

"This is a difficult matter," I now concluded, "and I like to sleep over such problems when time permits."

"But how do we run the kitchen tonight, sir?" asked Fazal Elahi.

"This is simple. I propose that till tomorrow we officers take it over."

There was no time to lose, so we donned overalls and immediately took over the kitchen. The bewildered cooks and waiters were told to stand aside. They stood there in a bunch and other inquisitive sepoy collected around them. I noticed

Fazal Elahi crying profusely over the onions, but I continued calmly with the potatoes. I had just cut my fingers for the third time when someone at my side said quietly, "Please let me do that, sir." And the next moment all the sepoys had volunteered to work in the kitchen.

The months that separated the two evacuations made them different in many ways. It was now high summer, and this meant fewer lice and less typhus. But the additional months of hunger and privation in Russian camps meant more of the diseases caused by deficiency of vitamins. Almost everyone suffered from scurvy or rickets or pellagra, or other grim results of malnutrition. This was specially sad for children. They had signs of twisted and stunted growth, and were destined to carry the marks of those years for the rest of their lives.

But life on the open beaches was no longer inhospitable, and there was an air of organized efficiency about everything. The one thing that had not changed was the bottleneck out of Pahlevi. The road to the rear had worn badly under heavy traffic, and transport was as inadequate as before. There was a longer stay for many more Poles at Pahlevi than on the first occasion.

They put this hold-up to good use. The beaches were turned into parade grounds, the whole place became a military training camp. Day after day, hour after hour, squads of sickly soldiers began marching up and down the sand to the high-pitched shouts of ruthless drill instructors. The anemic instructors, with their earnest authoritative manner and their ill-fitting uniforms loose on wasted bodies, were a combination of noble dignity and pathetic humor. Unable yet to carry the full load, their weak backs would bend under their soldiers' packs, but the vision of a rejuvenated motherland enabled them to keep their heads high.

We who watched them saw them change day by day. Their chests began to fill out, their backs to straighten, their steps became firmer, their voices deeper; there was a rhythmic swing

in place of the shuffling gait, and their heads were held higher still. Poland seemed to be rising from its ashes under our eyes.

My final recollection of Pahlevi is that of a glorious day in late August. The Poles had spent a hectic week decorating triumphal arches, putting up bunting and flags. The children had dressed as for a festival. The women had conjured up a supply of rouge and lipstick from nowhere. The uniforms were once more neat, ironed, well fitting. A great Polish leader was in Pahlevi on a long-expected visit.

On a raised reviewing platform erected on the beach stood Lieutenant General Anders. Flanking him were other high-ranking officers. Overhead in the gentle breeze fluttered the silken flag of Poland, its colors bright against the blue sky. The sun shone, the powerful military band played stirring music. In this magnificent setting the refugees, turned accomplished soldiers, held a crisp ceremonial parade to show their paces and to honor their commander in chief.

The Poles not in the parade were there to see it. Standing three deep along the route were the women and children, the sick and the aged. The parade began. Its clockwork precision was impressive. But my eyes had moved from the parade to the spectators.

For a surprised moment I did not understand it; the onlookers were in the throes of some deep emotion. They were greeting the soldiers as they marched past, but not with a shout of approval; that was a shriek of ecstasy.

They had clenched their fists and were biting hard on their handkerchiefs, their bodies convulsed with the rapture they could not contain. Witness to this rebirth of Poland, they were shaken to their deepest being. The agony of that joyous scene was more than many could stand. They shut their eyes, turned their faces away; they broke down and wept.

Close beside me stood Ross. Tears rolled down his wizened cheeks.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Assignment: Persia*

SOON AFTER the ceremonial parade for General Anders, the medical regiment returned to Teheran to await another assignment. Teheran, changed greatly, was swarming with foreign soldiers of many nationalities. In addition to the British and the Russians, the mysterious comings and goings of the global war had brought Americans, Poles, Greeks, South Africans and others whom we could not even place.

With so many insignia and badges of rank to learn, correct protocol became difficult, and we soon gave up the attempt. Instead we adopted rough-and-ready rules, and improved them with experience. Why not judge rank by the elegance of the uniform and by the amount of the rainbow included in the decorations? This led to Russian generals being ignored and Free French corporals being specially honored. When the Russians complained, we decided that in the touchy atmosphere of Teheran, when in doubt, we would salute; but someone soon found an easier remedy: at the sight of an unknown uniform, look intently elsewhere. But there were exceptions; as when courtesy took us out of our way a dozen times to seek and salute a particular officer. Such chivalry was reserved for women officers of the Russian military police. They were golden-haired blondes whose youthful beauty made you forget the tommy guns on their trim shoulders.

The hotels were fuller, the restaurants were crowded, the shriek of the dance bands louder and the lights on the cinemas more glamorous. No more did you need a practiced eye to



recognize the occasional women of easy virtue. Aggressively advertising their ancient profession they stood in packs at the street corners. The town had become Gay with a capital G. It was more hectic, more crude, more vulgar.

But round the corners, a block or two away from the thoroughfares frequented by foreign soldiers, was the different Teheran of the common man. Here the war had brought misery and hunger, overcrowding and filth, shabbiness and disease. Typhus was already taking its toll. Many whose normal trades and professions had been disrupted by the war had come from the countryside in vain pursuit of bread and work. The tenements and hovels were filled to overflowing, and complete families were living in caves on the outskirts of the town.

There had been a great rise in prices. This did not matter to us, for we were on military expense accounts, nor to the few Persians with easy money from their commerce with foreign troops or with wits and connections to work on the black market. For all others life had become a grim struggle.

Neuwirth was still in Teheran, and soon I went to see him. "Back from Moscow, or still waiting for travel clearance?" I twitted him.

"We waited a long time," he answered, "but we never got a yes or a no from the Russians. Now I am with the Persian government's Department of Health. How does Teheran strike you after your long absence?"

"Pathetic and shabby," I replied. "Even you are no exception. The gilt on your shoulder insignia has worn off."

There was a peal of laughter, and he shook me joyfully by the shoulders. "I could do with more of this shabbiness," he shouted, when he found his voice again. "I have been promoted. This is a lieutenant colonel's silver oak leaf. The major's insignia was the same thing in gold."

"I am delighted," I said, as I shook him warmly by the hand. "But what snobbery to put silver above gold."

. Neuwirth brought me up to date. His assignment was part of an American plan to help Persia with its shaky economy. Government machinery was creaking badly. Nothing adequate had emerged to fill the political and administrative vacuum left by the British deportation of Emperor Riza Shah eighteen months before. His had been an efficient one-man dictatorship, which had lasted a whole generation. Now the country was a parliamentary democracy, but how can you produce overnight those habits of self-discipline without which a democracy cannot work? Riza Shah had been a dominating father, ruling the household with the whip, making the children work to their own material advantage. For fear of him, they worked hard in their fields, they built themselves towns and roads and factories. Now that he was gone, they could give rein to their suppressed urge to play truant.

Then there was the problem of leadership. Some of those in titular positions of authority under the vanished colossus were men of straw. Often that was the main reason why he had chosen them. Now the country's need was a team of dedicated leaders working on a common program. But the departure of Riza Shah had left in power, not a team, but individuals whose only common bond had been their servility to the dethroned emperor.

The genuinely patriotic politicians were faced with another difficulty. They lacked the trust of their countrymen, given only to proven leaders; there had been no chance for it to develop under the previous one-man rule. And without that trust it was not easy to rally the people behind the program of sacrifice and austerity needed at the time.

"It is a grim picture," concluded Neuwirth.

"Yes," I agreed. "I had sensed some of this from the local press."

"Can you read Persian now?"

"Yes," I replied with some pride. "And I can speak it quite

well. Consider me your unpaid interpreter while I am here."

Neuwirth then told me of his work. He was one of the American experts assigned to the Persian government. There were others with the Departments of the Army, Finance and Food. "This has been thrust upon us," he said. "The Persians will not accept either the British or the Russians in such positions."

"Who is with the Department of Food?" I asked. I had been distressed at seeing large unruly crowds in front of bakers' shops. In some towns there had been looting and bread riots.

"He is a wealthy, self-made businessman with experience in the Middle East. He reached here ten days ago. His name is Sheridan, and you will enjoy meeting him."

"Let us do that soon," I said. "I have heard much about the American business executive, and I am eager to meet one in flesh and blood."

The next day I accompanied Neuwirth on his busy rounds of the local medical institutions. There was grave danger of a typhus outbreak, and the resources of the capital city had to be mobilized quickly. Here were lives as much endangered by the global war as those of soldiers on the battlefield, and Neuwirth was working with the same sense of urgency to save them as he would have shown under active combat.

Later in the morning he took me to see Sheridan, whose office was in a big three-story building. Sheridan was a massive, powerfully built figure. He stood up to welcome us, continuing the telephone conversation in which he was already engaged. The warm firmness of his handshake made me wince; the broad grin on his likeable round face put me at ease. With a puckering of his expressive brow and a quick nod of his big tousled head, he suggested that we sit down on the comfortable settee in the corner while he finished his phone call.

I looked round the magnificent room, at the elaborate chandelier, at the large mahogany desk, at the heavy brocade curtains, at the pretty coffee tables near the settee, at the trim

hatstand in the corner, and then at the second telephone on Sheridan's desk. This was cream ivory in color. The one he was using was black. Suddenly the ivory instrument came alive with a musical tinkle.

"Hold on a moment," shouted Sheridan into the black phone, which he replaced with a bang. He picked up the ivory one. I became all ears.

"Yes, Excellency," said Sheridan into the ivory mouthpiece.

His Excellency must have had important business, and took a long time saying it. It was a one-sided conversation, with Sheridan's share only the odd grunts required by courtesy. His own view of the matter came at the end. It was brief and to the point, "Excellency, order them to be shot."

The phone went down immediately, and conclusively. Sheridan wiped his hands against each other in a symbolic gesture of cleaning them. Then he calmly pushed back his chair and came over to join us. I stood up to shake hands with him once more.

"Sheridan," said Neuwirth, introducing me, "this is Lieutenant Colonel Ata-Ullah, normally of the Indian Medical Service, just now my unofficial interpreter."

"Glad to meet you. Neuwirth has already told me of your work at Pahlevi." And then, utterly unconcerned with my consuming curiosity about who were to be shot, he embarked on the details of an unusual hand dealt at a game of cards the previous night. He continued the bridge post-mortem without sitting down, and as soon that was out of the way, proposed that we lunch with him. "That would be nice," agreed Neuwirth. My consent was taken for granted. "Let us go to the Teheran Club," said Sheridan, as he picked up his hat and led the way out.

The exclusive Teheran Club was the social center of the local British community. Most of their upper ten were there, sipping coffee or taking unobtrusive naps behind the broad

pages of the *Daily Telegraph*, or the *Manchester Guardian*.

"Well, how is the food situation developing?" asked Neuwirth, as we sat down at a corner table and gave our orders.

"Badly," replied Sheridan. "The government grain-buying organization is bringing into Teheran less than sixty tons of wheat a day. To feed the town properly takes three times that amount. There are no reserves. We emptied the last bin in our grain elevator two days ago."

"What do you plan to do now?"

"The last harvest was a good one, but most of it has gone underground from fear of famine, and hope of black-market profits. We have passed a new law to get at the hoarders. This situation is not unknown here, and there are records in recent history of how bakers guilty of such practices were punished."

"Were they shot?" I asked, thinking of his telephone conversation.

"No," replied Sheridan. "They got the punishment to fit their crime. They were burned alive in their own ovens. But our new law stops at prison sentences."

"Do you expect much from it?"

"I did, until this morning," replied Sheridan. "But I am now beginning to be doubtful."

He had good reason. A few days earlier an angry crowd had collected in front of government offices shouting slogans. "We are hungry, we want bread, we want to see the ministers." The ministers had been forewarned and had gone home. One of them lived close by, and the frustrated crowd collected outside his house. He tried to appease them, but they pulled out his furniture and carpets into a pile on the street and set fire to it. Then they dispersed quietly.

Sheridan had gone that morning to see this minister and had expressed his sympathies. "I hope your Excellency's losses were not serious," he had said. "Not at all, Mr. Sheridan, not at all," His Excellency had replied with a smile. "It was not really a

vicious crowd. As soon as they had set fire to the furniture, they seemed relieved and soothed. But it was a narrow escape, and there was a dreadful moment when they came close to the door of the basement." Here His Excellency had lowered his voice. Even though no one else was present, the secret of the basement was only breathed in a whisper into Sheridan's ear. "My private stocks of grain were lying there, and on that day I had a hundred times the amount allowed by the new law. I am now using another place."

"That kind of a minister ought to be thrown out of office," said Neuwirth indignantly.

"I agree," said Sheridan. "But Persia is now a democracy, and a minister stays in power as long as he can line up enough political support. But don't forget the political corruption of the last generation in the United States."

This observation must have been made out of kindness. Sheridan had seen me squirming uneasily at the guilt of a fellow Oriental.

I enjoyed that meeting with Sheridan, and gradually I became as much his unofficial interpreter as Neuwirth's. Sheridan was good company, always calm and cheerful. The food situation became progressively difficult, his own responsibility steadily heavier, but his sense of humor never flagged. He was deeply concerned at the distress and suffering of the common man in Persia, and he unceasingly asked for relief supplies from the British, Russian and American ambassadors. The Allies were hard pressed at the time for shipping and transport. "There is a lot of grain in the country" would be their usual reply, "and it is the duty of the Persian government to get hold of it before asking for outside help." This made Sheridan renew his efforts. He held lengthy meetings with officials, traders, farmers, landlords, bakers and all others who could advise and help him. I was present at some of these talks, and often I sat with him in

his office till late at night, as he thought out loud and made his plans.

Before long the medical regiment got a new assignment. We were ordered to the holy city of Qum, four hours' drive south of Teheran, to join British III Corps. This was a crack, mobile battle formation that had moved into Persia against a possible German break-through in the Caucasus. The implications for us were important. Gone would be the independence of remote Pahlevi, of the assignment without rules and regulations. We must change back to the groove of routine, adjust once more to a life by numbers. And without delay, or someone would lick us into shape.

Our large mess tents went back with our compliments to the field hospital from which we had taken them. Maula Bux was ordered by the adjutant to reduce my baggage to forty pounds. This was a problem, since Maulee's resourcefulness had gradually raised my living standards to those of a wealthy desert sheik. In the early days of low prices, his nose for a bargain had helped in the purchase of carpets, miniatures, illuminated manuscripts, antique silver and porcelain. At his suggestion, I now sold one pair of Kashan carpets. With the increase in prices, this gave me back my entire investment. The remainder, now free of cost to me, Maulee packed with a light heart and loving care to be sent back to India.

At Qum we camped next to an antiaircraft unit with strange guns of a type I had not seen before. All around were other units of III Corps with their paraphernalia, much of it new to us. The Polish evacuation had kept us isolated for a year, while great developments were taking place elsewhere in the equipment and techniques of warfare. Major advances had been made in our own field of military medicine of which we only had theoretical knowledge.

"We are no longer the crack unit that staged demonstrations

for others," I said to the assembled officers the day after our arrival at Qum. "And we don't even know the full depth of our ignorance."

"That is going to be easy, sir," said Fazal Elahi. "Last night I visited one of the other medical regiments here, and found them dying to tell us how ignorant we are."

"Encourage them all you can," I suggested, quoting one of my favorite Persian proverbs: "If you do not know, and you do not know that you do not know, you are doomed. If you do not know, but you know that you do not know, you will be saved."

Later in the day we received a visit from our corps surgeon, who arranged to set up a training program that would bring us up to date in three months. There was also a program of leave to India by turn, as we had now been overseas for a year and a half. My own leave would come after the three-month training period, if there were no untoward developments.

The role of III Corps was to protect the Middle East oil if the Russians lost the battles then raging at the gates of the Caucasus. A medical regiment is too far down the military hierarchy to have inside information on high strategy, and for that very reason we were full of ever-new rumors: "III Corps will move right up to the Caucasus, give the Russians close support." "No, not that, we will meet the Germans in prepared positions near Teheran." Then came the news that one of our toughest generals had gone to Tiflis for consultations; and rumors brought us minute details of the Russian reaction. "We will discuss no hypothetical matters," they had said, as they sent the general packing back. "We consider it an insult that you should talk of a German break-through."

In the meantime, we settled down to our training in earnest. A small party went off to India to the envy of those left behind. To see them go made me suddenly homesick, and I began to fret out the weeks to the time when it would be my turn.



All at once, I seemed to have been away from home not eighteen months, but a lifetime. Qamar wrote often, vivid lines steeped in love and understanding, life-like pen pictures of her troubles and joys with the children, news of family and friends. But her letters failed to calm and soothe, they began to upset and make me miserable. The people she wrote about did not seem the persons I had known so well; suddenly there was an unreality about them.

The Anis I knew was two and a half years old, quite different from this precocious four-year-old boy that Qamar talked about in raptures. Munir had been a roly-poly dumpling with three healthy ropes of fat round his waist that had made him a prize-winning baby. He could stand against chairs and tables but he could not walk, and he invariably held his chubby tongue stuck out of the corner of his mouth. This picture marked Munir that Qamar had sent seemed a mistake; there were no rolls of fat, the tongue was decorously hidden, the face had an intelligence that I could approve but not the helplessness that I had loved. And then there was Shahid. He was Qamar's current hero, but to me a stranger. He had been born after I left, and when she wrote his praises I refused to believe her in some queer jealousy of my unseen infant son. I would try to pull myself together. "Are you crazy, or do you suffer from the Oedipus complex in reverse?" I would ask myself helplessly. I wanted to go home at once, afraid that in three months more my family would become complete strangers.

An added anxiety was the news of my father's ill health. I knew of this from Qamar and others, for father, though he wrote regularly, seldom touched on this subject. His letters were full of the hundred and one things that kept his life useful and busy. I wrote to him about my current mood of loneliness and received a reply that was typical of him. "To the true mind," he wrote, "every sunrise gives a thousand new reasons for thankfulness to the Lord. Pain and trouble and grief and death

must touch you also. Do not meet them with despair and despondency, but with action and patience and prayer. Then, with the Lord's grace, your sorrows will become milestones of your spiritual progress, instead of brooding scars in an embittered memory."

I drew new comfort from father's advice, even though I had heard it before. He often said little things that meant much because he said them at the right time. His godly words were like vitamins for the spirit, of no importance until one had been deprived of them long enough, but without them you sickened quickly to a gloomy view of the world.

We had been at Qum about a month when I was sent for by the corps surgeon. "Here is an urgent note," he said. "It is from the corps commander, who wants your reply by tomorrow."

Headquarters  
III Corps  
November 26, 1942

### *Corps Surgeon*

1. Mr. Sheridan, the American Adviser to the Persian Ministry of Food, is anxious to have the services for one month of Lt. Col. M. Ata-Ullah, as he considers that the latter would be of great assistance to him.
2. The proposal has been referred to Army, who have replied as follows:

"If His Majesty's Minister approves, Lt. Col. Ata-Ullah can go to Teheran to assist Mr. Sheridan, subject to the following provisions:

- (a) he remains in command of the regiment, and visits it at Qum at intervals,
- (b) he lives in Teheran at a military establishment, and no claim against the Government is incurred, and,
- (c) it is understood clearly that any assistance rendered is purely unofficial."

3. Please let me know if the officer agrees to the above provisions, and is willing to assist Mr. Sheridan, so that I can have Mr. Sheridan informed.

D. F. Anderson  
Lieutenant General

On the side there was a hand-written scribble: "H. M. Minister does approve."

I lay awake most of the night unable to make up my mind. The regiment was my second home, and to be away from it in my present mood would make me doubly lonely. My home leave was only two months away; would that be upset if I went to Teheran? I had wanted to ask the corps surgeon but had not found the courage. Sheridan's was a difficult human task in which I wished him well, but beyond my knowledge of Persian there was nothing in my experience and training to make me of great assistance to him. To my regiment I was of real assistance in their training program, though in no sense indispensable. If Sheridan wanted me only for a month, it would be churlish to refuse, but if at the end of that time he wanted me to stay longer, what then? Would I have the courage to say "No"? Could I stay on with him without risking promotion in my military career?

I called upon my reason and logic, marshaled the facts in neat array, counted up all the fors and againts, and found myself no further. Finally I sought guidance through prayer. Words that I had often heard in childhood welled up from within me:

"O Allah, I seek help from Your knowledge, and strength from Your power. Show me the course that will be blessed as I follow it, that will be fruitful in results.

And lead me to it,

And if there is a course that is evil as I follow it, that is barren of results,

Please bar me from it, my Lord of infinite knowledge, my Lord of infinite mercies."

I left for Teheran the next day, reaching there in the evening twilight; my wayward thoughts now with Qamar and her dream, now with Sheridan and his problems. I telephoned him immediately on arrival.

"Meet me at the British Embassy in half an hour, in the room of the additional counsellor," he said in an urgent tone. "And let us dine together afterward."

Driving through the familiar streets of Teheran, I saw restless crowds in front of many bakeries. They were clamoring for bread though the shops were empty. Soon we were inside the massive gates of the embassy. Sheridan was already closeted with the counsellor. I shook hands with both of them and then sat by as they discussed reports that had come in from the major towns of Persia. It was a confused picture, made worse by the division of the country into three zones by the Allied forces. The north under Russian occupation was fertile and had surplus grain. The southern part under British occupation was self-sufficient only in good years. It was a sensitive area, as it included the textile town of Isfahan and the oil towns of Kermanshah, Ahwaz and Abadan, where organized Communist cells welcomed any pretext for fomenting industrial trouble. The central zone was the overgrown capital city, with only a third of its food available from its close neighborhood.

Sheridan's immediate preoccupation was the difficult situation in Teheran, and he appealed to the counsellor for more help from British Army stocks.

"I will try," replied the counsellor, "but army stocks are meager. The Persian government must get the surplus in the north."

"I have talked to the Russian ambassador," said Sheridan. "He says there is a shortage in the north as well."

"What do your own Persian officials say?"

"Those in my Teheran office blame the Russians. Those who work in the north support the Russian version. I am sending

an American to investigate. But that will take time, and our need in Teheran is immediate and desperate."

How immediate and how desperate was dramatically underlined before the words were fully out of Sheridan's mouth. In reply, the counsellor was about to make some forceful point, raising a long artistic hand in a gesture of polite emphasis. The gesture was never completed. It was cut short by the sound of a series of rifle shots in quick succession.

There was a hush in the room. The shots had been fired in the nearby Islambole Avenue, and the grave expression on the faces of my companions gave me a clue to what had happened. The police or the troops had fired at a mob rioting for bread.

For many minutes no one uttered a word. Then the spell was broken by the ringing of the telephone. Soon Sheridan and I took leave of the counsellor, who promised to have some more grain released from army stocks.

We drove to dinner through empty streets, except for detachments of patrolling soldiers and some waiting ambulances. Sheridan is a hearty eater, and one of my own major problems is to keep my weight down; but neither of us could eat much that night. Sheridan soon pushed his plate away.

"I cannot get that firing out of my mind," he remarked. "I hope no one was killed. In a way I feel personally responsible."

We met early next morning at Sheridan's office. "What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Act as my eyes and ears, and help me think things out," he replied. "I spend too much time with ministers, officials and diplomats who are liberal with advice based on preconceived views. You won't be tied to a desk, and can see things and meet people that I would never come across."

"I doubt if I will achieve much."

"I am not looking for any achievements. This month, when basic decisions must be made, is crucial. The difficulties are novel and will increase as the war goes on. It will be a tragedy

if we start wrong. As a free lance, you will possibly spot the clues that the officials might miss."

I began by talking to Sheridan's assistants, and with his blessings visited other Persian towns and many far-flung villages. I took along men from the Teheran office, too long tied to their desks, and joined in their meetings with the local officials. It was a delight to see them clearing up mutual misunderstandings. This led to realistic instead of paper plans.

Over much of the Middle East, bread is laboriously handmade in individual households. Unleavened freshly kneaded dough is spread out like large thin pancakes and baked on an iron plate or on hot pebbles. In the towns there are small professional bakers who supply the neighborhood. Their bread is tasty when fresh but it does not keep and must be baked and sold twice a day for the morning and evening meals. Teheran had hundreds of bakers, each with his small oven in a dingy, smoky corner.

To keep the cost of living down, the government supplied flour at a subsidized price, and bakers were supposed to sell bread at a moderate fixed profit. But they could save themselves trouble and make a higher profit by selling their flour unbaked on the black market. What each baker did depended on his courage, his conscience and his contacts; but that much of government flour was not turned into bread for the poor was clear beyond doubt.

My month with Sheridan was coming to an end. "I must return to military duty next week," I said to him one day.

"I hope you have the solutions ready," he said.

"They won't be my solutions," I replied. "I have merely picked the brains of your staff, but I will give you my views for what they are worth."

Sheridan cross-examined me ruthlessly. In the next few days he made his decisions and his plans.

The attempt to find the hoarded grain would be given up as hopeless. The Allies must bring in enough to feed Teheran

until the next harvest; not in dribbles, but in one large amount. Relieved of the worries of hand-to-mouth existence, we could set about creating an effective country-wide organization to collect the coming harvest. We would buy it as it was harvested, before the crop was moved from the fields.

"How do you feel about starting bread ration cards in Teheran?" asked Sheridan, when we had finished discussing the grain-collection plans.

"It must be done," I replied. "But I fear that your flour will even then keep leaking away through the bakers."

"I fear the same," he said. "But is there nothing that we can do?"

"Well, government itself might start baking bread and sell it directly to the people. Bread will not keep and cannot be hoarded."

Sheridan pointed out the obvious difficulties. Who would design a bakery to deal with a hundred tons of flour per day, all with hand labor? Could it be built fast enough to meet our crisis? How much would it cost? Bakers were a politically organized group and would not sit still when we took over their businesses. People liked their bread fresh and crisp; mass produced, would it reach them in acceptable condition?

"Interesting but hardly practical" was his summing up of the idea. I agreed.

At the end of my allotted month Sheridan asked me to stay until it was time for me to go to India on leave. The Persian Minister of Food supported Sheridan's suggestion. I had seen little of the minister, but enough to have developed a high regard for him. He was lean and wiry in build, brisk, almost jerky in movement; a picture of suppressed energy under constant tension. He had a thoughtful wide brow, and deep-set eyes. In serious discussion, his gaze developed an intensity that seemed to penetrate your hidden thoughts. He was clean but careless in his dress, and so uninterested in his food that he

had a half-starved appearance. His only interest was the service of his country, and he lived in unending agony over the current suffering and troubles of Persia. I have met few people in any country whose patriotism was so intense and so positive.

Sheridan got approval for my further stay from the British authorities, but not without difficulty. They offered him other officers who were experts in government administration, but he was adamant. "I clinched the matter," he told me later on, laughing heartily, "by assessing you arithmetically: Ata-Ullah for two months now equals a shipload of wheat six months later." How could one refuse so generous a person?

Having made his decisions, Sheridan lost no time in informing the Allied embassies about his plans. He took me along to these meetings to give detailed answers to criticisms and questions. Grain for Persia meant reduced lend-lease supplies for Russia, but we met general good will and we soon gained our point. Twenty-five thousand tons were promised by the British for quick delivery, and the Russians immediately matched the amount. It was a great relief.

The harassed Prime Minister, with his unending political and economic problems, was delighted when Sheridan conveyed the news to him. "This is a good time for you to be presented to the Prime Minister," said Sheridan, as he took me along. "I shall ask his formal approval for your association with the Persian government. It will help in your further work."

"What will be Ata-Ullah's duties?" asked the Prime Minister.

"He will be our inspector general, responsible for the entire grain-collection program," replied Sheridan, on the spur of the moment.

"How long will he stay with us?"

"In two months he must go home on leave. When he returns, he will stay with us till the end of the war. I request Your Excellency's approval to that arrangement."

His Excellency neither gave nor withheld his approval. For



Sheridan this was approval enough. I expressed my surprise as soon as we came out. Sheridan excused himself on the grounds that this was his only chance of getting the Prime Minister's agreement.

"You are not committed to anything that you may not want," he explained.

I told Sheridan that I did not like the formal title of inspector general. Some of the senior Persian officials would misunderstand it, and consider it a derogation of their authority. Few in the West can understand how sensitive is the national pride of Eastern people, and I had seen the result of one of the American adviser's exerting formal authority over his Persian staff. He had made them unco-operative and sulky, and was accomplishing less than they would have achieved without him. I did not even have the glamour and prestige of being an American. For the previous month I had been called a liaison officer, and I thought it best to continue that way.

"Under normal conditions," I told Sheridan, "I could have done nothing that your own officials could not do better. But in the confusions and dislocations of the war and the multiple Allied occupation, I can be useful in certain fields. I must keep to those fields. I am used to hard travel, and I can provide co-ordination between your planners in Teheran and the workers in the countryside. The British and the Persian air forces have already promised to fly me around in an emergency, and as far as I am concerned the emergency will be continuous."

"That will be useful, but your real contribution will be different," said Sheridan. "You know both Eastern and Western ways, and understand how their minds work. You are at home in either company. Already, among the Persians, the British, the Americans and the Russians here, there is much avoidable misunderstanding. With you about, there will be less of it, at least in the sphere of food."

"I can do all that without high title or formal authority."

"Just as you wish," agreed Sheridan. "Call yourself what you like and ask for the authority you need. Only give us results."

"Results flow from Divine Grace," I said. "We can but try and pray."

"There speaks a good Muslim," countered Sheridan. "But I would say that your success at Pahlevi was due to your own efforts."

"I would like to think the same," I said, "except for the sobering recollection of something once said by my father." I had shown him a magazine picture of a racing-car driver titled, "The Proud Holder of the Land Speed Record." Alongside was a column of lyrical praise, with many boastful quotes. "Beware of such vanity" was father's quick reaction. "Beware of the illusion that you are the creator of the car's power just because your foot is on the accelerator."

"Surely that was a great performance," I had suggested.

"Of course, if you want to forget everything except that foot on the accelerator; if you want to shut your eyes to those others who put that accelerator there. There were the inventors, the engineers and the craftsmen whose accumulated knowledge and skill produced that car; those who found the oil and refined the special fuels; those who sweated and labored to dig and smelt the ores. Before priding yourself on a success, be sure that you did more than press a pedal."

"Are you a fatalist then?" asked Sheridan.

"No. Nothing exasperates me more than the idea of a blind fate, and the absolute paralysis of will to which it leads. It is the alibi for much avoidable misery in the East. My guide is the forceful statement in the Qurān: 'Man achieves only that for which he strives.'"

"Surely that is the typical modern attitude."

"With a vital difference," I explained. "In the moment of success the modern materialist behaves as if it was all his doing, while the God-fearing person feels that he has only pressed the

pedal. Even the ability to manipulate the pedal well, he would acknowledge, was a divine gift. In one case there is pride and arrogance; in the other humility and thankfulness."

In the next two months the grain-collection organization was expanded rapidly. The haste produced numerous problems, and inevitably we made many mistakes. Fortunately, the basic plan, primarily the work of Persian officials, stood the test. Throughout the war it needed no change.

Arrangements to issue bread ration cards in Teheran were also pushed forward, but difficulties arose at every stage. Our trouble with the bakers became worse and worse. Sheridan discussed the subject with me at length one day, and at the end pursed his lips thoughtfully and said: "Maybe we ought to put up our own bakery after all. I believe you should make a serious study of how it can be done."

"I don't know the first thing about it," I protested.

"It will have to be an improvised affair," said Sheridan. "There is not the time to do anything else. Why don't you get together with some engineers and some bakers and make some experiments."

Much against my wish, I was launched into this new activity and was soon beyond my depth. So were the engineers and the bakers teamed up with me. We discussed and experimented with all kinds of ideas. We were deadly serious at the time, but in retrospect some of our doings stand out as the silliest things with which I have ever been associated.

We borrowed huge cement mixers from a railroad construction company, in a vain attempt to solve our problem of mixing a hundred tons of dough every day. We wasted much time getting ideas for mechanically fired ovens from a small glass factory. We put a batch of dough through its ovens and were delighted at the lovely brown crust on the very first loaf of bread that came out. We could hardly wait for it to cool before tasting it.

The crust was delicious by any standards; but alas, it was only a quarter of an inch thick. The inside of the loaf was an uneatable mudlike putty.

After retreating from our scientific blind alleys, we reached a down-to-earth conclusion. If we wanted our bakery to work, we must faithfully copy the bakers of Teheran. We must restrict our ambitions to similar small ovens, worked equally inefficiently. Luckily there were three large empty sheds close to the town's grain elevator with room for scores of such ovens. These were immediately taken over, and more as a psychological threat to the bakers rather than a considered plan, were named the "Central Bakery."

The grain collection work took me on delightful journeys to remote parts of the country, and for the first time in my life I discovered the miracle of air travel. These journeys, whether by road or by air, were never dull. There were the contrasts of landscape alternating between rugged wildernesses and lush green oases. There were the stretches of rarely traveled roads infested with armed bandits, and once I missed an ambush by a mere half hour. In some areas there were warlike nomadic tribesmen known to be harboring German agents. And as my requests for air travel became more frequent, I found myself traveling with decreasingly efficient pilots, and in increasingly decrepit planes, until one day we missed disaster by a narrow margin.

Our destination was Isfahan, three hundred miles due south of Teheran. A few minutes after take-off, I fell asleep, to wake up an hour later. "Where are we now?" I asked the pilot through the intercommunicating rubber tube, more to relieve mutual boredom than from any interest in the dull country over which we were flying.

"I am not sure," he replied.

"Perhaps you can check it from your map," I suggested.

"I have not brought a map," he answered.

"Let me spot where we are," I said to myself as I began a scrutiny of prominent landmarks. By now I knew the geography of Persia well, and I had flown this same route before.

"What compass heading are we flying?" I asked.

"My compass is jammed" was the reply, to which a minute later he added the reassurance, "But don't let that make you anxious."

"Where is the sun?" I now asked myself involuntarily. It was still early morning and there were many clouds about. But a golden yellow patch in the sky showed clearly where the sun was. It was behind our tail. We were headed west, not south.

I checked and double checked this conclusion. Then, with an effort at conscious casualness, I pointed this out to the pilot.

"Please stop worrying me," said his angry voice into my ear-phones. "You want to get to Isfahan, don't you? I will get you there."

"By eight-thirty as you promised?"

"Yes" was the sullen reply.

At eight-thirty we were well into the snow-covered mountain range that separates Persia from Iraq. The views all around were magnificent, but I felt unable to enjoy them. My mind was gripped by the thought that we were headed for certain death. At nine I made the halting suggestion that we turn southeast. Then I pointed out firmly where southeast was. Now my suggestion was accepted without demur. Only in the nick of time did we reach open country. We made a perfect landing in a meadow on our last drops of fuel. We were a hundred miles from our destination.

Such diversions and preoccupations with ever-new problems made the weeks fly. One afternoon as we sat in Sheridan's office, sipping lemon tea from tall glasses held in frames of filigreed silver, I was handed the following telegram: TWO MONTHS LEAVE SANCTIONED. PASSAGE TO INDIA ARRANGED NEXT SHIP. PROCEED TO BASRA AT ONCE.

Ten days later I was in the port town of Basra. I had missed the ship on which I was originally booked, but another one would be sailing soon. With Japanese submarines prowling in the Indian Ocean, sailing dates were irregular and secret, but I was excited and happy and did not mind the delay.

I left Basra a week later, but not by sea, and not for India. I was called back to Teheran by the following telegram: IF ATA-ULLAH NOT YET PROCEEDED EX-BASRA HE SHOULD RETURN TEHERAN IMMEDIATELY TO ASSIST IN BUILDING CENTRAL BAKERY AND ORGANIZING BREAD SUPPLY. I knew that Sheridan's problems were urgent, but it was not easy to bear the shock. All the way back to Teheran I was in a bleak, despondent mood; it seemed I would never again see Qamar and my children, my family and my friends. What a fool I had been to accept that one month's assignment with Sheridan in the first place. I was ready to burst when I reached Sheridan's office, especially when he greeted me not with an apology, but with an unrepentant grin.

"I could not give you the good news in the telegram," he said as he saw the puzzled look on my face, "as the matter is not yet official. But I have a promise that in return for your leave being cancelled, your wife and children will be allowed to join you here."

Qamar's dream had come true.

Work on the bakery was started at once and continued day and night until completion. We had to employ an army of accountants, organize a fleet of buses and set up retail counters all over the city. In this last matter, the local tailors came to our rescue. Many of them agreed to store and sell our bread in the mornings and evenings and to do their normal business during the rest of the day.

The core of our problem was to hire enough good bakers, and to make sure that they would not deliberately produce inferior bread to give us a bad name. For weeks we had a war of nerves with their powerful union and there were stormy meetings at

which I was the government spokesman. Eventually I arranged a compromise truce. With the greatest outward reluctance, coupled with the deepest inner relief, I agreed to restrict the bakery to half of the flour issued from day to day. This left us with a manageable burden. Also, competition between our staff and the bakers would not leave the public either at the mercy of bureaucratic bungling or of the bakers' greed.

In the meantime, there were timely and widespread rains. The prospects of a good harvest made our ration cards and our bakery ten times more effective in easing the crisis. By a fortunate coincidence, just at this time Sheridan had to make a formal report to my superiors on my work. In his generosity, he gave me credit for everything except the rains:

Lt. Col. Ata-Ullah has been responsible for organizing the new bread distribution system, and he has aided in the establishment of the massive central bakery built by the Government. It was principally due to his tact and ability that he succeeded in setting up an entirely new institution without loss of time, and that the change-over from the age old system of private baking to centralized baking was made without social disorder, unemployment and other expected difficulties. As an organiser, Lt. Col. Ata-Ullah possesses remarkable attributes. . . .

What a blessing to have such teammates. My heart sang in thankfulness for days.

In truth, the bakery was no revolutionary social advance. It meant high overhead costs and wasted effort, and it could not survive the return of normal conditions. Technically it was a backward step. In spite of trying, we never learned to make good bread consistently. Often it was obviously bad bread. But the problem of the moment was any bread, good or bad, and to this problem the bakery made a helpful contribution at a critical stage.

About this time Sheridan told me that he would leave Persia in another few months. Conditions were getting out of hand, and

more American experts were on the way to help the Persian government. These Americans would no longer work individually, but would form a team under Dr. A. C. Millspaugh. Millspaugh was a distinguished economist who had done pioneer work in Persia twenty years earlier and had made a great reputation as an administrator. He had left behind the legend of being a financial wizard, and on arrival in the country he was to be invested with near-dictatorial powers.

"Millspaugh's mission will be vital for Persia," said Sheridan. "He must have a free hand to choose his colleagues. I have written and told him that I shall vacate my place as soon as he can get his own man."

"In that case I too must return to my regiment."

"That will be a tragedy," said Sheridan. "I hope you will not do so in a hurry. Let us first discuss this with Millspaugh when he gets here."

The last few weeks with Sheridan laid the foundations of our enduring friendship, and Persia never felt the same after he left. In time there were a dozen Americans and Britishers working alongside me in the Ministry of Food, with all of whom I was on excellent terms. The Persian officials were soon treating me as one of themselves. But the sense of crisis and imminent disaster had gone. We were still working late hours in the office, but at our individual desks. No longer did we herd together without excuse as we had done in the early days. I liked my new colleagues, but with none of them was I able to establish the free-and-easy intellectual exchange that existed between Sheridan and myself. And I felt his going all the more as it coincided with the loss of my dearest friend.

For about the same time, from India, came the news of my father's death.

I had asked Maula Bux to call me an hour before dawn that day, because I was due ninety miles out of Teheran at a



grain-collection meeting in the early morning. As he woke me up, he handed me this telegram from Karamat: FATHER PASSED AWAY.

"What is the news, sahib?" asked Maula Bux, anxiously scanning my face.

My mind had become a blank and there was a bottomless void in my heart. A shiver of frightening loneliness convulsed me before I could pull myself together with conscious effort. The noble teacher at whose feet I had sat for forty years had departed. The lifelong friend, the guide to whom I turned whenever I was in trouble had gone. I was in trouble now, and to whom could I turn? Was there ever father like him? No. If it was right to mourn, here was cause for great mourning, but I must be worthy of him, and he had taught me by word and example how to behave in the face of death.

He was an affectionate son and I had seen his composure at the funeral of both of his parents. He was a loving husband and I recalled his noble dignity at the time of my mother's death. But he was no stoic, for he had nursed her with singlehearted devotion through a long illness. Every time that she had been in pain, his warm heart had suffered equal agony: only, he knew that death was but a temporary parting, that he would meet her soon again.

He had often told me a parable about earthly life and the meaning of death. I now drew comfort from recalling it. It was about a twin brother and sister, who were still unborn babes in the womb of their mother. Life was beginning to throb haltingly in their tiny bodies, but it needed a gesture of welcome before it could take firm root.

Would they welcome life? Or would they let it pass them by? For new life is painful like heavy awakening from unfinished sleep. How could they want any change when unending slumber was their only experience? How could they know whether life would be a gift or a curse?

They hesitated for an eternity of time, though by our reckoning it was only a moment. But it was their moment of destiny, and their mother's longing to make them live came unknown to their aid. The mysterious force of maternal love quickened and inspired them, and in language softer than the breathing of flowers, this is how they talked to each other:

SHE: I feel an urge to move my limbs. Do you feel the same?

HE: Yes. But I am not going to do so. It will hurt.

SHE: But I must move them though it will hurt me too, because to move them is good. Not to move them is evil.

HE: Those are strange words. How did you think of them?

SHE: I did not think of them. They were put into me by someone; someone who loves us more than we love each other.

HE: Impossible. Besides, there is no one in the world but you and me.

SHE: This someone is here, and yet is beyond our touch, though I do not clearly understand it myself.

HE: Are you clear about good and evil?

SHE: Not very clear, but I have a general idea. If we are good, we will discover wonderful things that are now hidden within ourselves.

HE: Better than the sweetness of sleep?

SHE: Yes, better than the sweetness of sleep. And after you move your limbs, sleep itself will be sweeter than before. Let us be good.

He was not convinced and continued to lie still and asleep. She also slept long hours, but moved her limbs also every now and again. It required courage and a supreme effort of the will. But to her joy, each movement made the next one easier. First, she could only move her limbs aimlessly. Then she found herself able to move them where she wanted. Her little soul was thrilled as she told this to her brother.

SHE: Wake up, dear brother. I have discovered a great wonder, and it was within me all the time. Shall I show it to you?

HE: What is it?

SHE: My hands no longer drift by themselves, they go where I want them to. I have used them to feel you all over while you were asleep. Do you know how beautiful you are? How nice are the curves of your body? How soft the feel of your skin? But more than anything is my joy as I pass my hands over your lovely face.

HE: And have you learned more strange words from the someone who is here and yet not here?

SHE: Many. Some are very strange, like death, and heaven, and hell.

HE: Do you understand them?

SHE: I think I know what death is. About the others, my ideas are vague, for they seem beyond all understanding.

HE: Tell me about death then.

SHE: Give me your hand, and feel this throbbing stream which runs into my body. If I break away from it even for a moment, I must turn into nothing. That is death.

HE: But why should you break away from it?

SHE: I can feel signs of others having lived in the world before us. As they are no longer here they must be dead. If death came to all of them, it must come to us too.

HE: Will that be the end of everything?

SHE: It must be, and yet heaven and hell are to come afterward. That is what I do not understand.

HE: But you did have some vague ideas.

SHE: Very vague. Oh, how I wish I could go to the other side of death and come back with real knowledge. But heaven seems to be the place to which we go if we have been good. Otherwise we go to hell. Heaven is continuously warm without being cold or hot. You float in it smoothly and never receive a jerk. Its pulsing stream of life runs in a caressing rhythm

without ever becoming violent. No one ever gets tired there, however much they move their limbs. And above all, in heaven you will learn the secrets of things now so difficult to understand, as you will be face to face with the someone who is here and yet not here.

She continued her growth into a strong healthy body. He continued to sleep, and his limbs and joints remained weak and stiff. Time passed on and on until they lost all reckoning. The future seemed to have no end. And then, without warning and without cause, they found themselves in the throes of death.

Their world that had been kind suddenly turned cruel; its love turned into hate, its tenderness into savagery. It had always hugged them softly, it wanted to crush and destroy them now. And this was the same world that had given them life, that had nourished them so long. This was the end.

Little did they know that death and birth were two sides of the same coin which might well be called "death-birth"; that just when they were terrified at the thought of imminent death, they were performing the great miracle of birth. She was right, that life depended on the flow of blood from the womb, that a day would come when that flow would cease. But how could she know what the Great Designer had provided against that day? Within the limitations of her world, how could she foresee the marriage of lips with nipples, of lungs with air? How could she understand that death from the womb meant life on the earth?

Birth was a terrifying experience, but with the first rush of air into her lungs came instant relief. She was still alive. And as she saw the wonders of her new world, her relief turned to joy, her joy to ecstasy. To see with the eyes, to hear with the ears were miracles; the taste of milk on the tongue, an intoxication; the loving gaze of her mother, a thrill. In comparison with this, life in the womb was death. Suddenly she knew where she was; she recalled telling her brother about it. She was in heaven.

For a long time she did not see her brother. Then one day he was next to her on the same cot. She had missed him, and was eager to exchange news.

SHE: Oh, I am glad to see you again. Where have you been all this time?

HE: In a terrible place where I suffered endless agonies.

SHE: I am sorry.

HE: There were giant demons wearing shrouds from head to foot, armed with instruments of brutal torture. I lay helpless as they cut and bled me with knives. They bent and twisted my limbs until I could hear my bones break. They branded me with red-hot tongs and ruthlessly pushed needles into my muscles. It was a thousand times worse than the hell you talked about in that earlier life. I wish I had never been born.

Her affectionate heart was heavy with grief at the woes of her little brother. He had been born diseased and deformed and would never be strong and healthy like her. But the parents were doing all that was possible. The demons were no other than kindly surgeons, the hell nothing but the hospital.

The parable of the unborn twins was father's favorite, but he had other similes about life and death. "All things, whether living or otherwise," he would say, "are subject to change. The change can be slow and gradual; that is how the child becomes a man, the sapling a tree, the stream a river. Our puny minds find this easy to understand. But there is another kind of change, a breath-taking arrival in a new world, with strange new qualities emerging as if from nowhere. The steam that drives a mighty turbine is the same thing as the gently falling snow; within the green tree lies the warm glow on the hearth; the crawling maggot is the butterfly on beautiful wings. This kind of change is the real glory of divine creation, though it remains beyond belief until seen at firsthand. If the thought of a life

hereafter baffles us, it is no wonder; for to the unborn babe abortion seems the only reasonable end."

"We are getting late, sahib," called Maula Bux, breaking into my recollections. He was right, for we had a busy day ahead. I went through the day as best I could, filling each free moment with one or another of father's memories. Few sons can owe as much to their fathers as I did, for he also had been mother, teacher, doctor, priest, playmate and friend.

## CHAPTER XV

### *Home Station*

DR. MILLSPAUGH was unlike Sheridan in many ways. Lean in build, with a dark clipped mustache on a pale oval face, he had a businesslike expression which was often tinged with kindliness but rarely ruffled by a smile. Outwardly calm and relaxed, on closer acquaintance one found him full of suppressed energy; methodical and careful of detail to an extent where these qualities had become ends in themselves; courteous, considerate, almost charming, but never friendly; freely accessible when you had work with him, otherwise preferring solitude to company; always dressed correctly, ever mindful of protocol; his one pre-occupation was to serve Persia in the great difficulties then besetting the country.

Sheridan and I called on Millspaugh soon after he took office. Sheridan left the country a few days later, but Millspaugh asked me to stay. I was happy to do so. Primarily because of good seasonal rains, I was confident that our grain-collection program would go well, and it would be very satisfying to be associated with the success. When the harvest was well gathered, it would be nice to receive praise and compliments from His Excellency the Minister and other high personages, many of whom had consistently predicted our failure. Also, Qamar and the children would live with me in a delightful house provided by the generosity of the Persian government, and for a junior army officer on foreign service in the middle of a war, this was a unique blessing.

It was a wonderful day of joy and thanksgiving when Qamar

and the children arrived in Teheran, and a kindly Providence gave reality to her dream in an unbelievable manner. Anis and Munir had grown, but were recognizably the same; they were briefly shy, but we were soon back to our earlier friendship. But it took much effort before I won approval of Shahid, the newcomer. For weeks he would look at me resentfully out of the corner of his eyes, especially if Qamar showed interest in me or I in her. But in time he too accepted me as a friend and then there was no end to the fun we had together.

The next two years of family life were uneventfully commonplace and utterly unforgettable. I can recall some landmarks. There was a small baby deer that a friend gave Anis for a present. Anis named it Bambi after a Walt Disney film then showing in Teheran. Bambi refused to eat anything in captivity, and soon became a pathetic sight. Equally pathetic was Anis' dilemma of whether to let it die or to set it free. He asked my advice, but I could only tell him to make his own decision. Qamar was deeply moved by the obvious agony of his little torn heart, and she rejoiced when he took Bambi into the open mountain country and let the deer loose. Then he cried for the whole day, and for a week afterward grumbled at me in a continuous tantrum that it was all my fault.

Another landmark often recalled with delight is Shahid's pursuit of butterflies during the second summer. Unlike other children of his age, he was not content to chase them, but had a clever method of catching them by the dozen in glass tumblers. Picking up the nearest tumbler, and taking off his shoes, he would stealthily approach any butterfly that he saw resting on a flower. He would intelligently watch the wind direction and the fall of his own shadow so as not to scare away his quarry. On reaching striking distance he would become very deliberate. He would stand still like a statue for minutes at a time, watchful, an expression of intense concentration on his pretty face, the



tumbler suitably held according to his estimate of the direction his prey would take.

What happened then was never clear to us. Perhaps he moved the tumbler forward so slowly that the butterfly was caught unaware. Perhaps he exercised some secret power long since lost which hypnotized the lovely creatures into trapping themselves, for they usually flew into the tumbler, not away from it. He frequently caught eight or ten in an hour, and often kept at the game for hours on end. He broke tumbler after tumbler in the process, as he held them with a delicate grip, and they fell out of his hand every now and again. While his obsession lasted we were constantly afraid that he would cut himself with broken glass, but he never did so.

His interest was only in the chase, and he never hurt the butterflies. If he caught an unusually pretty one, he kept it for a short time to admire it and to show it off to us. But generally he looked for an excuse to liberate his prisoners without delay.

"The poor little darling," he might say, thinking aloud. "It seems to be crying for its mother. I had better let it go today, and catch it again tomorrow." Or, "This is so beautiful. It will be a sin if it dies in my hands." His thoughts were often novel and sometimes he rejected them one after another until he found a satisfactory one. In the end he always found good reasons for mercy. He would set his captive free and immediately plunge into a full-blooded chase again.

For Shahid, that was a summer of fun and frolics. Not so the winter. In February the very heavens fell for him with the birth of his brother Farid. For months, the bewildered downcast look never left his pretty cherub's face, except when he raged in anger. Farid was of delicate health, and needed Qamar even more than was his due as the last born. Shahid's disapproval of Farid was vigorous and vocal; his logic about the unwanted rival was as novel as that about the butterflies. "He is not warm in the blankets; let us put him in the oven." "He is crying because

he is not happy in our house; let us give him to the camels." The situation was saved to some extent by Maula Bux, who gave up all other work to become Shahid's whole-time playmate.

The wartime problem of food was not peculiar to Persia; it was a common problem of many countries of the Middle East. Someone in authority in Cairo called a meeting to discuss this common problem, and I was commanded to attend. Afterward, I was ordered to go to Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, for a week's stay in each country to study their food administration. I have never obeyed an order with greater enthusiasm.

It was wonderful to visit the pyramids and to gaze once again at the Sphinx. I enjoyed the seagirt beauty of Beirut, and roamed lovingly through the covered bazaars of Damascus. I marveled at the fantastic engineering of the temple of Jupiter at Baalbek, and shuddered at the barren grimness of the Dead Sea. I visited the tombs of the ancient prophets of the Qurān and the Bible, whose teachings and stories had been a part of my being since childhood. I spent four days in Jerusalem in a mood of mystic exaltation.

There are parts of Jerusalem sacred only to a Christian, parts sacred only to a Jew. I was a pilgrim to all of them, for to me as a Muslim they were of equal sanctity with the Mosque of Omar and the Dome of the Rock. As if in a dream, I wandered up and down the streets of the holy city and its surroundings, tears of ecstasy in my eyes, my soul aflame with the thought of the many great happenings in this town that had so powerfully shaped the spiritual destinies of mankind. I felt purified and strengthened in faith, enriched and ennobled by having touched such hallowed ground.

The pleasures of officially sponsored pilgrimage and travel and the joys of living with Qamar and the children were multiplied a thousandfold by the fortunate outcome of my work in Persia. When the harvest came, we collected all the grain we had

planned for, and half as much again. In the succeeding year we did even better. We started with the psychological advantage of large stocks, and a tested field organization, and we were blessed with another good crop. We gave up bread rationing in many towns, but even so we ran out of storage space. Our success was so much beyond expectation that it became a major embarrassment.

The principal cause of this wonderful turn of events was the free bounty of nature, helped by the selfless work of Persian officials. But they worked behind the scenes, whereas I was constantly at cabinet committees and high-level meetings. As a result I got most of the credit. I did not go out of my way to correct this impression, and was happy that my halfhearted attempts to do so were brushed aside as excessive modesty. Soon I was on terms of intimacy with the highest in the land and a privileged spectator of the workings of the hidden wheels of secret state policy. It was exciting to be in the know of things, and at times I could have played an active role in the political maneuverings that went on in wartime Persia. But I resisted the temptation for fear of making a fool of myself in a highly technical field. Besides, the best way to ensure adequate food supplies in the prevailing chaos was to keep clear of other people's controversies, and to get everyone's co-operation.

However, our house was often used as neutral ground where highly placed political adversaries could meet without loss of face. It is hard to say if this ever helped anyone, but it provided me with a better understanding of the undercurrents of local politics. I was particularly fascinated by the position of the British in Persia; they were strongly entrenched and yet vulnerable; their interests were obvious and simple, but tangled in an atmosphere of mystery and intrigue.

The official British policy was to respect the independence of Persia, and keep aloof from internal affairs except when a vital British interest was involved. But what is a vital interest? When

is it threatened? These were considered matters for exclusive British judgment. The wartime need to guard against German penetration was a vital interest. So was the long-term need to counter Soviet influence near the Indian Empire and the Persian Gulf. The large investments of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had to be safeguarded.

The Anglo-Iranian was almost a parallel government in the area of its operations, and its "subjects" were the envy of other citizens of the country, as they were better paid, housed and looked after. Its resources, almost unlimited by Eastern standards, gave it great influence, and it was only human that this influence was sometimes used indiscreetly. I recall visiting an outlying province for discussions with the Persian governor of the area, and staying as the guest of the senior officer of the oil company. The next morning I telephoned the governor. "When may I come and pay my respects to your Excellency?" I asked. My British host, who was listening, pulled the telephone out of my hands, and practically ordered the governor to call on us. "He is a nice informal type" was the explanation given to me. Much of the informality, I discovered later, was the result of His Excellency having received gifts of whisky and other imported articles available in wartime only to privileged foreigners.

Perhaps it was no more than good public relations to give whisky to the governor. The same could be said when a nice job was given to the suitable son of an important politician or the nephew of a high-ranking civil servant. It would be hard to draw a line and refuse financial help to a friendly newspaper in difficulties. Or withhold quiet support from a sympathetic candidate in a crucial election. But many Persians condemned these as corrupting practices, especially if they had been ignored by the British, or if the British did not consider them worth the price they wanted.

I was in no position to know the whole truth, but the average Persian firmly believed that the British "public relations" net

was Machiavellian and widespread. As a result the British had become the convenient national scapegoats, and at their doors were laid all the misfortunes of the country, real or imaginary. The best way to kill anyone's political career was to brand him as pro-British. The smart Persian politician abused the British in public, but assiduously courted them in private.

There was a basic weakness in the British position. Expediency forced them to support the privileged few with outmoded vested interests, and to ignore the needs of social justice. The great-grandsons of the authors of the Magna Carta, and the most progressive people at home, the British wanted things to stand still abroad. This was the painful dilemma of Sir Reader Bullard, the British ambassador, whom I came to know closely, and who even from the Persian point of view deserved more sympathy and less censure than he got. He was a gentleman with an old-world integrity and honesty of purpose; more a savant and less a diplomat. He was in duty bound to further British interests, but his concern with the wretched plight of the Persian common man was genuine. This was in marked contrast with some eminent Persian politicians, whose concern was vehemently expressed in public but was belied by their actions. Sir Reader was surely no Machiavelli, and if he was, then the most Machiavellian thing he did was effectively to hide that trait from me.

These and other complexities of the Persian situation proved too much for Millspaugh. He came when the country's economy was already at breaking point from the effects of the war and the Allied occupation. The life of the average Persian was changing rapidly from the pathetically bearable to the tragically impossible. This could not be cured, though it could be alleviated by strong, unpleasant measures of austerity and taxation directed at the upper and the middle classes. But it was these classes that ruled the country, and most of them saw no sense in using their own authority to hurt themselves. However, they could not forever stand still and evade responsibility, as even

the proverbial worm will turn. So, when Millspaugh arrived, all responsibility was conveniently and formally placed on his shoulders, and then everything was done to make him ineffective.

Millspaugh asked for wide administrative authority. He received it immediately. At once he issued the orders that should have brought the situation under control. Nothing much happened. The Persian bureaucracy was unable or unwilling to put his orders into effect. Millspaugh met the situation by demanding more powers. Dictatorial powers were voted him by the Persian parliament without delay. He issued new orders, demanding that his earlier orders should be carried out. The results were no better. Millspaugh now hit upon the bold plan of appointing Americans to every key position in the administration.

It would have been a problem at any time to find quickly so many Americans with the right skills and temperament. In the middle of America's own involvement in a global war, it proved impossible. But Millspaugh was not deterred from carrying out his plan; if competent Americans were not easily available, the available Americans were easily called competent. Many of those who joined Millspaugh were unsuitable misfits whose sole qualification was their nationality. The result was chaos and confusion, followed by bitter recriminations. Millspaugh called the Persians unco-operative; they blamed him and his American colleagues as inept and inefficient. There was truth on both sides. There were arguments and counterarguments, until this controversy became the major preoccupation of the country, and all constructive work came to a standstill. In the end Millspaugh's special powers were repealed; he resigned and left the country halfway through the period of his contract. I was by now almost a part of the Persian government and continued to work there without noticing any change.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Return to India*

SHORTLY AFTER the fall of Berlin, I requested the Minister of Food to let me return to India. "Your grain stocks are substantial," I said to His Excellency. "My further presence is of little help, and would be politically unwise after the war ends."

"Not at all," he replied in his usual gracious manner. "You are one of us, and war or peace, I want you to work here."

I was touched by His Excellency's attitude and was sorely tempted to take the path of least resistance and linger on. Life could hardly be as comfortable in India as it had become in Teheran. Qamar and I had genuinely become fond of Persia and its people. But it was clear that from now on they would need me less and less. I must not overstay my welcome.

Our journey back to India was made memorable by the abundant hospitality we received on the way. We moved at a leisurely pace in a cavalcade accompanied by two truckloads of baggage, taking ten days for the four-day trip. We passed through the sacred city of Meshed, where there was much to see. We spent a day at the tomb of Omar Khayyám at Nishapur, reading his *Rubáiyát* in the original Persian, trying to pick out which was which in an illustrated edition of FitzGerald's famous English translation which we were carrying with us. To his countrymen Omar Khayyám is better known as a great astronomer than as an inspired poet. The Persian national poet is Firdausi, the author of the *Shah Namah*, one of the greatest epic poems in any language. We paid our homage to Firdausi the next day at his tomb in Tūs.

Many were the kind words of appreciation that I heard in town after town from my onetime Persian colleagues. But at one place I had to listen with bowed head to some harsh words spoken in righteous anger. Paradoxically, the kind words are now only a dim memory, whereas the harsh words remain fresh, especially to Qamar, who dwells on them with glee whenever we talk about that journey.

We had spent a night in two bare second-story rooms on top of a fruit shop. It had mud walls, mud floors, a mud roof laid over uncut poplar logs and a narrow mud stairway leading up from the open courtyard. The much-used stairs had been worn so smooth that for a safe passage one had to keep pressing against the walls with outstretched hands. I avoided all unnecessary use of the stairs, but the children used them on every excuse. Scorning the support of the walls, they slithered down again and again to the accompaniment of joyous shouts.

The next morning we had to make an early start. Qamar and I waited while the cavalcade was made ready by Maula Bux, and then Shahid burst into our room to call us. At four years of age he was a handsome, self-assured boy, his chubby cheeks glowing pink with excitement. He went ahead of me; Qamar came behind us. "Mind, daddy," he warned me as he reached the top of the stairs. "Be careful; and please help mummy or she will slip." In a flash he had reached the bottom. I made my slow and clumsy descent, and had barely touched ground when there was an ominous screech from behind. Before I could fully turn around, Qamar had hit the dust with a thud.

There was a little delay in my reacting to the situation, but not so with Shahid. Shaking with indignation, his normally soft eyes blood red with anger, he turned upon me like a ferocious panther. "I told you to help her," he said in what was half sob, half shout; and he went on to fill the cup of my humiliation with his next remark. "After all she is your own wife," he added in a choked voice, and already there were tears in his eyes. Qamar



had been bruised in the fall, but she got up, and, picking up the angry ruffian, she forgot all her pain. It was days before Shahid forgave me.

Our travel program was often upset by the bad corrugated roads. Now and again our car and trucks would break down. They were suffering from wartime shortage of spares, and their synthetic rubber tires were not adequate for the sharp, stony gravel. We were on a sparsely populated, unfrequented route with few signposts, and we lost our way twice; once in an area known to be infested by bandits. I was uneasy. But Anis behaved like the Sandhurst graduate he was to become in his youth. He continuously prayed that we would run into an ambush. We could defeat and capture the bandit chief with a big price on his head, and win the fame and fortune that had eluded the Persian gendarmerie.

Munir neither wanted nor dreaded the bandits. He had the right instinct, that losing one's way was always a matter for delight rather than sorrow. You saw places that you would otherwise miss. You spent wonderful nights in wayside hamlets, where you could roam and shout and play; not be house guests of important dignitaries where good behavior meant talking in whispers. And how nice to have it finally and incontrovertibly proved that daddy also could go wrong.

When our heavily laden Buick burst its last spare tire, we were forced to stay in a six-family village for three days. At obvious inconvenience to themselves, but with a smile of sincere welcome, the kind village folk vacated a ten-foot-by-ten-foot room for us. This had to be bedroom, living room, bathroom and kitchen. Qamar performed marvels of housekeeping and we had a wonderful time. The uncontrolled naughtiness of the children was like a bridge between us and our shy hosts, and we came closer to them in three days than would seem possible in three months. We were almost sorry when the new tire arrived and we resumed our journey.

It was good to get back home to India, though without father the place seemed lonely. I visited his grave, but not in grief and not too often; for that is how he would have liked it. Sometimes I was melancholy that I was not with him at the end, and once I found myself wishing poignantly that he would come back though only for a day. But this desire was quickly quenched as I recalled his parable of the unborn twins. I was still in the womb. He had gone through death-birth into a wondrous new life, and I was wishing him back in the womb again! Fortunately, death-birth was a gift from the Great and Merciful Creator, and He was not the one ever to take His gifts back.

The only photograph of father with me is small, faded and a little out of focus; possibly meant in the first instance to be put on some document. When preparing to leave for overseas war service I had thought of asking him to have a new picture taken, but I had refrained. I knew what his reply would have been. "Gladly," he would have said with a smile, "but don't forget that I shall have changed even by the time we get the photograph. In two years it will be quite unlike me. Kindred souls do not need such flimsy bonds, for in the really worth-while sense they are near each other all the time; in spite of distance; in spite of death."

I can today bear witness that father was right, for in the really worth-while sense, his guidance has continued with me, in spite of time, in spite of distance, in spite of death.

Even apart from the gap left by father's death, the India to which I returned was very different from the India that I had left four years earlier. Though there had been little fighting on Indian soil, the world war had taken its toll of suffering and sorrow, and millions had died from such indirect effects as famine and pestilence. I became aware of these things only on my return, for in Persia such items, when not censored, were pushed out of the newspapers by the more dramatic reports from the battlefields. The country was in economic chaos. A few

friends and acquaintances had amassed fortunes as contractors to the armed forces, but there were many whose once-comfortable incomes had been so reduced by inflation that they were now in the grip of desperate want. The hold of the British on the country had weakened badly, and the only thing left in question was the time and manner of their leaving. Against that time Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh were getting ready to fight for the spoils. Hatred and indiscipline were in the air, profound and powerful forces were on the march, there was a general atmosphere of uncertainty and foreboding. I felt as if I were sitting on top of a volcano that would erupt at any moment.

But immediately on our return to India I was luckily given four months' leave. At least for this period we could live in the peace and quiet of our home in Qadian and pretend that all was well. This feeling was greatly reinforced by two good neighbors. One owned a nearby farm and orchard and kept many horses. These I was invited to use. I accepted the gracious gesture eagerly, and chose a beautiful-looking animal with large, kind eyes. I was upset when my confident choice was questioned. "No one ever rides it," I was told. "It bucks, and if it does not throw you, it will run away with you." I looked at the horse again, questioningly. "I am not bad," said the intense, pleading look in its melting eyes.

That horse proved an absorbing full-time job, but it was time well spent. Between the two of us, we were soon able to prove that what is called viciousness is often nothing but suppressed, unused energy seeking an outlet. I was thrown twice in the first week, but it was a considerate horse and it chose soft ground. I was not hurt. I let it gallop all over the open country, and when it had had enough on its own account, I asked it to gallop some more on my account. Soon it was a gentle lamb. It would neigh in loud welcome whenever I went near its stable, and its relations with Qamar and the children became very friendly. It enticed away half their ration of sugar, and followed

them like a pet. Anis and Munir were soon having their first riding lessons on it. Its ride was a delight. Its canter was so smooth that Shahid and Farid often joined me in the saddle, and shouted with fearless joy as the cold air whistled past our ears. When the time came to leave Qadian, Anis bade a happy good-by to his playmates, but broke down and wept on parting from that horse.

The other good neighbor was Zafrulla Khan, a long-time friend of my father. After a few years of brilliantly successful law practice, Zafrulla had entered politics, and in a very short time had attained cabinet rank in Delhi. By the end of World War II, he was a statesman of international standing, extensively traveled, and on terms of intimacy with eminent world leaders in all walks of life. In later years he was well known in the United Nations before becoming a judge of the International Court of Justice at the Hague.

Compared to Zafrulla, father's position in life had been a humble one, but they had a strong common bond in their equally deep religious faith. I had known and admired Zafrulla from a distance since college days, and over the years it had given me much vicarious pleasure to see his wonderful qualities win universal acclaim. Everyone talked of his intellectual brilliance, his prodigious memory, his magic eloquence, his razor-sharp wit and his high statesmanship. But I had not dared intrude much on a busy person with heavy burdens of statecraft, and our relationship had not been a close one. By a fortunate coincidence, during my leave in Qadian, Zafrulla was there on vacation. He made me welcome, and we saw much of each other. I became his privileged friend. He was a lover of Persian classics, and I had brought from Persia a special edition of Rumi, the great Sufi mystic. This gave Zafrulla much pleasure. He had many books in his library which I found of great interest. His endless stories of famous people fascinated me, and if he told a common anecdote he held me spellbound by the manner of

telling it. Behind a somewhat curt exterior I found a man of charm and humility, unspoiled by worldly success. I saw personal confirmation of what I had previously heard from father: much of what Zafrulla earned he gave away to deserving causes. Those few weeks in his company were a memorable education.

Unfortunately, that education came to a sudden unexpected end. I was pulled out in the middle of my leave, flown out to the Persian Gulf in a Royal Air Force plane, put down in the wild desert kingdom of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman and escaped becoming his Prime Minister only by a narrow margin.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *Muscat*

FOR MY TENTH BIRTHDAY father gave me an unusual present. I knew that it was expensive as the price was marked on it, but it left me cold and disappointed. I was told to hang it on the wall of my room, but I did so without enthusiasm. Six months later I was proudly inviting friends to see it.

It was a beautiful set of large-scale colored maps of the six continents that would have bestowed distinction on the geography room of any college. Father let me ignore the maps for some days and then broke the ice by turning the maps into playgrounds. He challenged me to a game which he called "find in-a-minute." I was to look away, while he picked and called the name of an unheard-of place, and if I found it before a minute was over I scored a point. Next, I called the place, and father tried to beat the stop watch. Gradually he introduced refinements that made the game more exciting, and occasionally there were prizes to compete for. In less than six months I was on thee-and-thou terms with mother earth, and was often able to put my finger on a place with my eyes shut. Certain names still remain associated with memories of that childhood game, and any mention of Zambezi, or Tomsk, or Kilimanjaro, or Muscat always evokes a pleasant thrill.

And so, when the British political resident in the Persian Gulf asked me if I would like to work in Muscat, I said a "Yes" first, and asked for details afterward.

I had called on the resident at his headquarters in South Persia to say good-by and to tell him that I was returning to

India. "What are your future plans?" he had asked.

"Nothing definite, sir," I answered, "but I want to go back to medical work."

"Would you like another foreign assignment?" inquired the resident.

"Where, sir?" I asked.

"At the court of Muscat."

"Very much so" was my instant response. My mind flashed backward to those maps, forward to my future visiting cards. They would be impressive. Lt. Col. M. Ata-Ullah, Surgeon General. The Kingdom of Muscat and Oman.

"But not as a doctor," continued the resident, handing me a cold drink, and with equal casualness explaining his proposal. "You will be the sultan's chief advisor or Prime Minister."

I had to make a conscious effort to remain calm, and took a minute or two to reply. "That is a high compliment," I said eventually. "But am I qualified for the responsibility?"

"As much as anyone I know. So far the sultan has been his own chief executive, but now he wants someone to help him. The climate is gruesome, and the problems are unusual. It will be more a challenge than a routine job."

I tried to inquire about the problems, but I was put off with a diplomatic reply. "I shall arrange that you visit Muscat," said the resident. "There you can make the sultan's acquaintance, and see things for yourself." I had to leave it at that.

The town of Muscat stretches like a horseshoe on the shores of a bay which commands the entrance to the Persian Gulf, and although of no consequence now, Muscat's place in Eastern history and legend is as important as that of Alexandria and Constantinople. Its anchorage, very well protected from the mainland by a wall of rugged and steep hills, had been an impregnable naval fortress in the days of sailing vessels, and was the hideout of pirates for centuries before and after the days of *The Arabian Nights*. According to local legend Sindbad the

Sailor was born in a scorching sandy place in the neighborhood. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was a bastion of Portuguese naval power in the East. Now under the sultan's autocratic rule, Muscat has an alliance with Britain against outside aggression, and in return Britain exercises control of Muscat's foreign relations.

On arrival at Muscat I went immediately to see the British consul, who invited me to be his guest. Obviously talented, this handsome young diplomat had the authentic stamp of high-grade British education on his accent and manners and on everything that he did. He had an engaging charm, but you knew that he would not tolerate familiarity; he was a good host, but you could remain his guest only if you conformed to his standards. He had served his country in many places including India, and soon he had me talking about mutual friends. We talked about Indian political developments, we talked about postwar Europe, we talked about recent advances in medicine; and although I tried to steer the conversation that way, the only thing we did not talk about was the Sultan of Muscat. And this was done with a conversational skill that produced neither irritation nor the feeling that he was being rude.

We took a long walk together in the afternoon, we sat talking after dinner until midnight, but it was only after breakfast next morning that he talked business.

"The sultan is very touchy about his prerogatives," he now said, "and your visit will require very delicate handling."

"I realize that myself," I hastened to reassure him.

"The purpose of your visit is known only to the sultan and me, and no one else must know about it until there can be a formal announcement. And the requirements of protocol forbid you to discuss it even with the sultan. He will not refer to it even indirectly; you also must not do so, or you will embarrass him."



"Then how will anything get settled?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Don't worry on that score. You will meet the sultan a few times so that you get to know each other. In between, I shall discuss details with him."

"Very well then," I said. "How soon can you arrange our first meeting?"

"I will ask the sultan when I call upon him in three days for my weekly visit."

The consul could not go to the palace earlier; that would be noticed and would produce undesirable rumors. My visits, too, would have to be well spaced for the same reason, and also because it would be disrespectful to rush the sultan. "Please make yourself comfortable, just relax and be patient" was the easily offered, but not easily practiced, advice that the consul gave me.

But once I had accepted the inevitable, I found much around me of absorbing interest. For hours I listened spellbound to my learned host as he talked on local history and customs. I took an occasional walk in the sandy stretch of open country near the consulate; and sometimes in more adventurous mood I went past the palace into the city itself. Its mixed population of Arabs, Indians and Negroes was a reminder of its checkered history, and the scenes in its dark and narrow streets were vividly reminiscent of medieval times. A wall with numerous watch towers surrounded the city, and against the unruly and fierce tribesmen still roaming the desert hinterland a bare twenty miles away, the wall was kept in good repair. There were tribesmen in the streets, but here, and in the twenty-mile strip of the coast within reach of British naval guns, they were men of peace. Outside this range, they led a free nomadic life. The hinterland of Muscat was burning desert and waterless mountain. The occasional waterholes gave the rugged, unruly tribes both life and a reason for living. Generations of bitter feuds and ruthless fight-

ing had centered on their wells. Compared to the law of the desert as practiced here, the law of the jungle would be the height of good behavior. The continuous chaos had recently crystalized under a religious leader called the Imam, who now challenged even the nominal sovereignty of the sultan. The British were declared infidels with whom the Imam and his followers would have no truck, the sultan a stooge against whom religious duty required the waging of unceasing holy war.

All this could have been ignored, except for a compelling reason. American companies had discovered large oil fields across the undefined border with Saudi Arabia. There were high hopes of a similar find in the Muscat hinterland, especially in the area called the Buraimi Oasis.

It would be my main task as the sultan's chief adviser to regain control of such areas for him, peacefully if possible, by force if necessary. There was no time to lose. More even than in love and war, everything was fair in the international oil game, and the Saudi Arabians and Americans already had their eyes on this possible treasure. The thought of taking even a minor part in such affairs was both fascinating and frightening.

In due course, I walked up the marble stairs of the palace, past bowing slaves, into the audience room of Sultan Said bin Taimur. The sultan greeted me with warmth, inquired about my health, asked if my journey had been pleasant and hoped that I did not find the weather too trying. I was happy to reassure him on these points. I expressed concern over the recent illness of the crown prince, and was relieved to hear that it was only a minor cold from which he had fully recovered. We talked of each other's hobbies, and I mentioned the remarkable accounts I had heard of the sultan's marksmanship. He said he would give me an immediate demonstration. He clapped his hands, asked for his rifle and from the window of the audience room fired six shots at targets fixed permanently on the cliff across the bay. He hit a bull's-eye each time.

A slave now brought in coffee, and a rich sweet of Arabian Nights fame called Muscat halwa. This had been foreseen by the methodical British consul, and he had carefully coached me on how I was to behave. I must not eat the halwa, though I must touch it with my finger. This would figuratively bestow it on the servants. When I had finished my cup of coffee, I must hold it between thumb and forefinger, and three times tilt it from side to side before putting it down. This would mean, "Thank you, that is enough."

The sultan was a thickset man in his early thirties, with a bushy Henry VIII beard, which admirably set off the olive complexion of his kindly round face. There was impressive dignity about the royal turban of gold and silver brocade and the loose embroidered robe, but I was quickly put at ease by the twinkle in the royal eyes which was a human mixture of merriment and loneliness. I was no longer worried that we would bore each other in my allotted forty minutes, and by the time the coffee and the halwa arrived I was deeply absorbed in the sultan as a friendly person. As a result I absent-mindedly ate large helpings of the delicious halwa; and as I constantly forgot to tip the cup, I had to drink three coffees, even though I did not relish the concoction.

Some weeks later I was told by the British consul that negotiations with the sultan had broken down. At losing the opportunity of becoming another Lawrence of Arabia, I was sorely disappointed, though not without a feeling of relief at the thought of Qamar and the children. Why the negotiations had foundered was never quite clear, though I can think of many reasons, in addition to the obvious one that I was unfit for the responsibility. Perhaps the new British resident, who did not know me, had someone better in view; perhaps with the British withdrawal from India now imminent, any Indian would have been an unwise choice; perhaps I had lost the job when I ate the halwa and drank three times my ration of coffee.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *Partition and Pakistan*

AS THE PENT-UP FIRES of hatred and violence, lust and greed burst into the open, events began to move with breath-taking speed. The flames spread far and wide until all of the Indian subcontinent was in the grip of vast conflagration. In the India that I had known, Hindu and Muslims had lived in amity and good will; they now turned upon each other in the most gruesome civil war of all times. Kindly neighbors forgot their generations-old traditions of mutual help, and began to rob, burn, rape and kill each other with utter abandon. Naked evil stalked the land, laying its curse on millions of once-noble hearts. Those who had never hurt a fly were driven with the urge of a maniac to foul deeds against women and children whose only crime was that they belonged to a different faith.

These were the death throes of the British Empire in India. The Hindu and Muslim successors of Imperial Britain, unable and unwilling to share the inheritance, were cutting the country in two. These were the birth pangs of a new nation of eighty million people, of whom I would be one. India was partitioned, and a new name added to the countries of the world, a name that had never been heard before: Pakistan. Overnight I was an Indian no more, I had become a Pakistani.

Someone hurriedly drew a line on a map to separate the Hindu and the Muslim areas, and that became the international boundary between the new India and Pakistan. But millions were left on the wrong side of the line, and they saw safety only in hurried flight across the border. Leaving hearth and home,

taking such meager belongings as they could carry on their mules and carts, ten million uprooted people jammed the few and narrow roads in either direction for long interminable weeks. Harassed by bands of savage marauders, overtaken by disease and hunger, many fell by the wayside, especially the old and the infirm. In the prevailing chaos thousands lost their wives and children; others deliberately abandoned them in the grim and selfish struggle for individual survival.

Beyond description was the plight of these refugees at the end of their weary march. To enable so many to start a new life would have been a difficult task even for a rich and prosperous country. It was quite beyond the undeveloped, newborn Pakistan. Many of the refugees were forced into a subhuman existence, and for years after the partition thousands were still living as beggars or occasionally employed laborers in exposed hovels or by the open roadside in Karachi, Lahore, Multan and other cities.

The partition of India caught our family and our belongings sprawled all over the subcontinent. I had moved a few months earlier to Delhi to an assignment in the surgeon-general's office. Qamar and the children had gone to Srinagar in Kashmir, where she owned a delightful house on the banks of the beautiful Dal Lake. Our main house in Qadian was left with a caretaker. Having become an alien in Delhi, I was ordered to Rawalpindi to join the headquarters of the new Pakistan Army.

I was to travel from Delhi to Rawalpindi by the crack night train called the *Frontier Mail*. I started early for the railroad station in a tonga, a two-wheeled horse carriage which is the principal means of transport in the bazaars of Northern India. It was an oppressive evening, hot and sultry, and the street lamps shone pale and watery through the dusty haze which hung low over the whole city. Our route lay along the historic Red Fort of the Moghul emperors, and as we neared it we ran into

a milling crowd which reduced our pace to a crawl. The crowd was in an excited mood.

"What has been happening?" I asked the tonga driver.

"The final taking down of the Union Jack," he replied. "From tomorrow the Indian tricolor will fly over the fort."

This was the formal end of an era, the symbol of the dissolution of a mighty empire, the opening of a new chapter in the book of history. What did it portend for me, I wondered, as silently I said an anxious prayer for the future. I prayed that my new homeland of Pakistan would be great and prosperous, but the mood of the moment was one of gloomy depression. I looked in melancholy farewell at the dark brooding walls of the fort, and across the road at the graceful minarets of the beautiful Moghul mosque. These monuments of India Muslim culture were the glories of the Delhi I knew so well, and I was leaving them behind forever. The mere thought was like a stab in my heart, and suddenly I felt less as if I were going home, more as if I were being exiled.

I was late in reaching the railroad station, but my train was still there. I rushed to my sleeping berth, put down my baggage and then came out on the platform to buy some reading material. I now noticed that the station was nearly deserted. The crack train was half empty. A railway official whom I knew came by.

"Are you traveling by this train?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. "I must get to Rawalpindi without delay."

"Then you have not heard what happened to the *Frontier Mail* in Amritsar yesterday?"

"No."

"A Sikh mob held up the train and massacred all the Muslim passengers."

I found this unbelievable and said so. The official Riot Manual made it the army's absolute duty to protect communications, and they would never let a mob gain control of a key place like the Amritsar railroad station. And anything unusual

yesterday would itself be the best reason that it would not happen again today. "I know many who would not travel by plane immediately after an air crash," I said laughingly. "But I would feel safest just then, as by the law of averages, the odds against two consecutive crashes are astronomical!"

My last day in Delhi had been physically and emotionally tiring, but I slept well on the train and woke up refreshed. It had just jerked to a halt at some station. "This could be Amritsar," I said to myself, looking at my watch. I was expecting to meet my brother Zia, who lived in Amritsar, and I wanted to check about that massacre. But on looking out of the window I saw that this was a station called Moga. Moga was not on the normal run of the *Frontier Mail*; we must be taking a route that would not go through Amritsar.

I put on some clothes and walked to a stalwart Sikh policeman standing not far from my carriage door. "Why has this train come here?" I asked him.

"Please return to your train at once," he shouted. "And if you value your life, you better keep your door bolted."

I was about to pull him up for rudeness on the strength of my military rank when suddenly things took on a deadly serious aspect. Somewhere close by there was the crack of two shots in quick succession, and a brief look around made me return to my carriage quickly and lock myself in.

From a chink in a window blind I now surveyed the station and its surroundings. There was no movement, no traffic; and the deserted look of the place was underscored by the battered shop fronts of the main street which ran parallel to the railroad track. Smashed furniture, broken glass, torn-up merchandise littered the abandoned shops and lay in disorderly heaps on the road. Two half-burned tongas on their sides added a grotesque touch, and the tragic picture was completed by some human corpses sprawling on their faces as they lay rotting in the sun. The station gates were shut, and a party of Sikhs armed with

long swords stood unconcernedly outside. A few passengers had alighted and were uneasily standing inside the gates. Some of them wore distinctive Muslim dress, and I shuddered at the possible fate that awaited them at the hands of their Sikh neighbors.

Soon there was a commotion at the other end of the station, invisible from my hiding place, but I learned its grim details later from a British general and his wife who reached Rawalpindi in a state of nervous collapse. Their three Muslim servants had been hacked to death while they had helplessly stood by.

At long last the train pulled out of Moga. Sometime later in the day it crossed the one-day-old international boundary and reached Lahore in Pakistan. Lahore had equally been the scene of arson, loot and murder, and parts of the town were still smoldering. Here to my shame I found Muslims of my acquaintance openly boasting of the many Hindus and Sikhs they had killed, of the property they had seized or destroyed, of the non-Muslim women they had abducted. I was in a state of helpless nausea for days after reaching Rawalpindi.

After a harrowing wait of three weeks, during which there had been little news from them, Qamar and the children also reached Rawalpindi. For reasons of safety they had not traveled the direct two-hundred-mile road from Srinagar. Making an eight-hundred-mile detour, they came via Delhi by plane, and escaped being caught there in a terrible slaughter of Muslims by only one day. They brought along with them a young stalwart from the far-off mountain state of Hunza. His name was Wilayat Khan. The children, with whom he was already on the friendliest of terms, called him Vilayati. Vilayati had left his rugged home in search of an easier life, and after a three-week journey in bare feet along the trail made famous by Marco Polo he had reached the paradise of Kashmir. Here our good fortune had made him cast in his lot with us. By the time he reached



Rawalpindi, he was no longer a servant. He had become a member of the family.

Our home town of Qadian now lay in the foreign territory of India, and Qamar was anxious to retrieve from there her houseful of precious belongings. She had collected many things there over the years: heirlooms of which she was proud, irreplaceable knickknacks of sentimental value, gifts bought and kept secretly to be given to the children at their weddings, things to go into the wonderful new house we were planning to build soon; these and other things bought lovingly and little by little from the savings of our meager salary. So I went to Qadian with two trucks and an escort of Pakistani soldiers. But the house had been ransacked and I returned empty-handed.

This was a cruel blow and Qamar broke down and wept. I tried to soothe her, holding back with difficulty my own tears at the thought of her distress. "God rewards those who are patient," I said to her gently, quoting from the Qurān. She pulled herself together instantly, wiped her eyes dry and the next moment her beautiful face was lit up with a heavenly smile. Her grip tightened on my hands, and she looked into my eyes with an expression of serene calm. "I am sorry, Ata," she said. "I hope God will forgive me, for really I should be shedding tears of joy. We are all safe and together; and you have a better job than ever before."

That has remained her mood ever since.

Our mood of thankfulness was fortified further when Qamar took into the house Sarwari, a ten-year-old refugee girl. One month earlier Sarwari had been living the carefree life of a peasant girl with her parents, two brothers and a sister fifty miles inside the new Indian border. In the communal blood bath, she saw her entire family brutally killed with hatchets, while she hid unnoticed and scared to death under a table. During the night she escaped and wandered around until she fell in with a column of Muslim refugees coming to Pakistan.

Compared to what Sarwari had been through we had lost nothing; the fortitude with which she bore herself made us feel small and ashamed.

Two months later came the news that Indian troops had occupied Srinagar. That meant the loss of Qamar's Kashmir property also, but this time there were no tears. "God's will be done" was her brief comment as her eyes moved toward the spacious lawn in front of our house. Sarwari was happily playing there.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *Azad Kashmir*

THE FRIDAY PRAYER had just finished, and I was about to enter my car outside the mosque. "Can I speak to you for five minutes?" said someone, coming up from behind.

"Certainly," I said, turning around. It was a young doctor whom I knew only slightly. It was a hot day, there was no shade on the road and the car was like an oven. So we went back into the mosque and sat down on the straw floor in a cool corner.

"I have just come from Poonch in Kashmir, where the maharaja's troops have run riot," began the young doctor. "First they made mass arrests, now they have begun indiscriminate killings. But they are counting without our military traditions, for if we have to die anyway, we will die fighting."

I could see the determination in his eyes, sense the resolve in his tremulous voice. In World War II almost every able-bodied Poonchi had enlisted in the British Indian Army, and there were probably more battle-tested veterans per square mile in the barren inhospitable hills of Poonch than anywhere else in the world.

"I am sorry" was all I could say helplessly, wondering why he was telling me all this.

"Will the Pakistan Army not help their Muslim brethren?" he went on. "In our hour of peril, will they remain idle spectators?" he asked.

As a staff officer at the General Headquarters of the new Pakistan Army, I knew the answers to these questions. The Pakistan Army was as yet only a paper army; the war materials

it should have received under the partition agreement were still being held back by a hostile India on flimsy pretext; except for my own boss, Surgeon General Faruki, all our generals and our commander in chief were still British. They would insist on strict neutrality. There were rumors that Lord Mountbatten, whom the Indians had retained as their Head of State, wanted Kashmir to join India, even though its 80 per cent Muslim population might want to join Pakistan. Unable to tell all this to the young doctor, I had to put him off. "Such things are above my level," I said. "Your leaders should take up these things with the Pakistan government in Karachi."

"That is being done," he replied, "but our desperate needs cannot wait. There was a battle at Trarkhel yesterday at this time. We drove out the Hindu troops, but our casualties were heavy, and all of them are still lying there without proper care. We have no instruments, no medicines, no dressings, not even a grain of morphine to dull the agony of broken bones and shattered limbs. Their wounds will go septic; many will die needlessly when simple medical care could have saved them."

There was a moment's silence as he tried to keep control of himself. But his eyes filled with tears that he did not want me to see, and he bowed his head. "Come and see all this for yourself, if you don't believe me," he added, when he had recovered again. "It is only fifty miles from here. You hold a key position in the surgeon general's office, you can help if you want. Please, for humanity's sake, you must do something."

I did what I could, though it was woefully inadequate. From other doctors in Rawalpindi, I collected spare surgical instruments, rusty syringes and needles, drugs they had got as samples or that were getting old. Some gave cash. I asked the military hospitals to go over their stocks and discard all that they could on one pretext or the other. The young doctor was more grateful than if I had given him a personal fortune.

The news from Poonch, multiplied by abundant rumor, soon

reached the northwestern frontier areas of Pakistan inhabited by Pathan tribesmen. To these fierce, independent, warlike people, never subdued even by Imperial Britain, the fighting between the maharaja's Hindu troops and his Muslim subjects was a holy war from which they could stand aloof only at the risk of eternal perdition. They buried their internal blood feuds—temporarily; they left their crops and cattle in the care of their womenfolk; they picked up their most prized earthly possessions, their rifles and their bandoleers; and they poured into Kashmir.

The pattern of British rule in India had not been uniform for the whole country. The most important areas were under direct British rule, but other parts of the subcontinent were ruled by autocratic princes under loose British overlordship. When British India was partitioned, the princes were given the choice of joining either of the two new nations; Hindu India or Muslim Pakistan. Most of them made a quick and happy choice, and the choice for the Maharaja of Kashmir was also simple and obvious. The people of his state were Muslims; all its links of culture, trade, geography and economics were with Pakistan. But the Hindu maharaja sat on the fence while his soldiers burned and pillaged the Muslim countryside. When his Muslim subjects fought back, and were unexpectedly reinforced by Pathan tribesmen, the maharaja made this the pretext for handing over the state to India. Indian troops were flown into Srinagar to defend this unnatural alliance by force of arms, and in so doing ushered in an era of tyranny and defiance of world opinion which must long remain a blot on the fair name of India.

With the Indian Army came heavy guns, armored vehicles, planes that dropped bombs and fired rockets. But the brave fighters for freedom were undaunted though their casualties increased greatly and the task of that young doctor became more urgent and more difficult.

Then one day came the news that the young doctor was dead.

For the rest of the day I could do no work. At the back of our Rawalpindi house there was much rough ravine-cut country, and in the afternoon I went there for some hard and wild riding. Both horse and rider returned dead beat, but even so I could not sleep that night.

"You are not well, Ata," said Qamar, as she found me tossing about the bed.

"Yes, my dear," I replied, "but it is a troubled mind, not a troubled body. I am having a row with my conscience."

"Won't you please tell me about it, and let me share your trouble," she said softly. "Perhaps I can even help."

My troubles generally vanish into thin air as soon as I can share them with Qamar. This one was worse than usual, and I did not want to tell her about it until later, but she coaxed me to do so.

"The fighting in Kashmir," I told her, "is going to be prolonged, and something has to be done about the care of the wounded and the sick. I am near, and I know their desperate need. Is it not my duty to go and help them? But if I go, what about my duty to you and the children? If something happens to me, you cannot even go back to Qadian or Srinagar."

She searched for my hand in the dark and pressed it against her lips. Then she remained silent for a long time. "You must do your duty as you see it," she said eventually, "and may God be your guide. But surely, this is not something for one person; this is something for the government."

The next day I took my problem to Surgeon General Faruki. He was aware of the general situation, and I told him about the martyred doctor. "Our government considers Kashmir's accession to India a fraud," said Faruki, "but our policy is to restrict and not to extend this conflict. I cannot order in any service personnel, but if you want to do something on your own and can persuade some others to join you, I will not stop you. On the contrary, I will wish you the best of luck and will help you

where I can. Not even the Indians should object to your humanitarian work."

I was delighted. With Faruki's powerful support, I could go beyond a small individual effort. I had an immediate vision of organizing a rudimentary medical service for the whole area of hostilities. I said so to Faruki. "Go ahead," he said.

I asked him for ten days' leave of absence to visit the area; to see things for myself and make some plans. "I will give you no leave," he said with a smile. "You had better learn to be in two places at the same time. Officially you will continue to remain on duty here; only if your chair is empty I shall not ask any questions. At least, not unless you make a fool of yourself and get captured or killed by the Indians."

It was an hour after sunset when Maula Bux and I walked over the primitive suspension bridge on the Jhelum River and crossed into Kashmir. An invisible sentry hurled a loud challenge at us as we came off the bridge.

"Hookumdaar," he shouted, in imitation of a British soldier's "Who comes there?"

"Friend," replied Maula Bux, as we picked up the sentry post in the darkness and moved closer to it to get clearance.

The sentry was soon satisfied. "Welcome to Azad Kashmir," he said, and beckoned us to move on. Azad Kashmir meant Free Kashmir, the area freed from the maharaja's control.

The bridge had been hung deep in a narrow gorge, and a steep winding road now led us upward to the crest of the ridge where we came to a large flat platform. Here pandemonium reigned. In the smoky light of kerosene flares, helped by an occasional pocket flashlight, a confusion of men and mules and baggage was trying to sort itself into the nightly caravan of supplies for the "front."

We were in a world of bustle and excitement and activity, where people worked by night and slept by day. Daylight hours

were treacherous, when Indian planes appeared suddenly from nowhere to attack anything that moved. The very next day I was to see a peasant woman and her two donkeys attacked by a fighter plane, and though the pilot could not have known it, she was carrying corn for her husband and two sons at the front and was presumably a proper military target.

Now there was a lucky coincidence, which was to prove of great help later on. Only a few days earlier a government had been set up in Azad Kashmir, and some of its ministers were traveling by tonight's caravan. The senior among them was their Vice-President and Minister of War, Ali Ahmad Shah. Shah was a retired Kashmir army officer with meritorious service in the mountain artillery, whom I had met once before. I decided to call on him.

My recollection of Shah was of a gentle old man interested in mysticism and philosophy, who lived like a hermit in his village on his army pension. Lean and tall, he had a long oval face and a finely chiseled nose flanked by prominent cheek bones. His scrubby dark beard was shot with many strands of silver gray, and his expressive eyes reflected a soul in deep contemplation. He wore a lambskin cap, and kept fidgeting with it, now pulling it forward until it covered the whole of his thoughtful wide brow, now pushing it back behind the receding hairline on his unkempt round head. Shah was hard of hearing and as an artificial aid he used a large silver trumpet, the narrow end of which he held in his own ear, with the flared end pointed at you to hear you better.

But the Shah I met tonight was a different person; not ascetic and mild, but grim and determined; with fire in place of a thoughtful look in his eyes. His hearing seemed to have improved, though he still found good use for his trumpet in waving it about vigorously to emphasize his speech. The philosopher had turned warrior, and in the process had become leaner, taller and years younger; though this may have been the effect of



his tight-fitting travel clothes and high military boots, or a trick played on my senses by the intoxicating mountain air and the strange wild setting.

"Peace be on you, sir," I said to Shah as I neared him.

"And on you also be peace," he answered. "But where is your uniform?"

"I am not here as a Pakistani officer," I explained. "But in my private capacity as a doctor I am at your service."

Shah was pleased and immediately gave me details of his guerrilla army. He spread out a map on the ground and in the light of a smoky flare held over our heads by an orderly, we discussed possible locations for hospitals and other medical facilities. We agreed on a program for my tour of the whole area, and information about it was sent ahead there and then by special couriers. I was given six guards as a personal retinue, as well as four baggage mules, and authorized to issue orders on medical matters. "You better go ahead," suggested Shah, when we had concluded our talk.

I accepted this good advice. It would get us to our destination quicker to travel separately; we would be spared the dust and the holdups of the main column. We set off at a steady pace and began a gradual climb on a narrow mountain path. There was a steep rock wall to our right; to the left was a sheer drop with the bright silver ribbon of the twisting Jhelum River far below. There was a following breeze, cool and gentle, which every now and again brought to us the sounds and smells of the main column. They reached us with such uncanny clearness that I had to look back to reassure myself that we were really getting away from it.

In a little while we went round a tight bend and then we were alone. The breeze, the river and the caravan were gone; the only sounds in the stilled and dark universe were our own: the tramp tramp tramp of our feet, the occasional snorts of our mules, the musical tinkle of the warning bells hanging from

their necks. From the mules my thoughts went to the muleteers, one of whom now burst into a jovial marching song with a lilting rhythm. I felt elated and thankful that I could help such people, and I prayed that my efforts would be fruitful and blessed.

Going round another curve, we entered a dense pine forest; cut off from the clear starlight, I stumbled every few paces. The going became worse when we came to a steep descent strewn with large boulders. The sure-footed mules and my companions kept their free-and-easy pace despite the stones and the pitch dark, but almost at once I fell sprawling on all fours.

Ten solicitous hands helped me up. "Are you hurt, sahib?" they asked. "No," I assured them. "We are more than halfway," said one of them soothingly, "and in ten minutes there is a village where we can have some tea and a rest.

Two of them kept close on either side of me for the rest of the boulder-strewn path, moving with an enviable grace. It was less a walk and more a dance in which they skipped from stone to stone with the rhythm of a gazelle at play. To my clumsy body it was a relief when we reached the tea shop in the halfway village and I was able to stretch out on a wooden bench.

The mules were quickly unloaded and against the chill of the night, Maula Bux and the others gathered near the glowing charcoal brazier, which was the principal equipment of the tea shop.

"What kind of tea do you make here?" inquired Maula Bux, hoping to provide something to my liking.

"Before the days of this holy war," answered the tea seller, "I worked in a British canteen. There I made tea to the British tommy's taste; bitter and strong, and sizzling hot, with enough milk and sugar to give it a full body. Now I can suit any taste, and I have customers of many nationalities. The tea habits of some of them would surprise you."

From an earthenware pot he filled a large kettle and put it on

the fire. Then he settled back in his rustic seat and with the enthusiasm of an expert plunged into a description of various tea habits.

"A Finnish engineer and a Palestine Arab now fighting at the front often stop by here, and neither of them want tea stronger than a light straw color. The Finn has to have a slice of lemon, and the Arab wants a lump of sugar to hold between his teeth through which he slowly sips his tea."

"That is just what the Persians do," interjected Maula Bux.

"Of course," said the expert in a lofty tone. "But do you know what the ancient Chinese did?"

"No," replied Maula Bux in a deflated voice.

"You would never guess it. They ate their tea instead of drinking it. Boiling it in the usual manner they threw away the water, and kept the leaves as we do with vegetables. They saw no point in treating tea and dried spinach differently, when both look so similar."

He went on to the American custom of iced tea, and told us at length of the elaborate Japanese ritual of the tea ceremony. There was a slight pause, the water kettle coughed out two or three puffs of steam, and Maula Bux mustered up enough courage to ask the question which was also in my mind.

"How do you prefer it yourself?"

"When I am alone," replied the master, "I prefer it the Kashmiri way in which I was brought up: lots of milk and sugar, a lump of rock salt and a spoonful of fresh butter in each cup. But it takes all kinds to make the world, and except that I do not like tea as a vegetable, I enjoy it any of the other ways of my customers."

I spent the following day in the Azad Kashmir "capital" visiting various government offices. The capital was housed in old tents, pitched irregularly in a pine forest as protection against air attacks. Some of the senior ministers enjoyed the luxury of

camp furniture, but the majority of civil servants were without these artificial aids. Brought up in austere Oriental households where chairs are curiosities, most of them were comfortably at work sitting cross-legged on ground sheets or on thin layers of fragrant pine needles.

The government had been formed recently and was no more than a symbol yet, but it was becoming a rallying point for the tough guerrilla leaders who had been fighting individual battles in their own areas. Some of them were on a visit to the government to ask for help and to obtain formal recognition of their own status. This was bound to be embarrassing, for every guerrilla leader that I met had assumed the rank of general and had generously bestowed corresponding high ranks on his followers. This was a cheap way of keeping them happy, for neither general, nor colonel, nor any other rank expected to receive a cent in pay. Mostly they also fed and clothed themselves, often in striking uniforms of their own design.

For the next three days I found myself traveling with one of these generals to his operational headquarters. He was a tall ferocious-looking person, with a thick grisly beard; the unkempt hair on his head was worn long and pushed back over the nape of his neck like a mane. This was customary with his whole tribe. The general's elegant jacket was frayed, but its authentic military ancestry was obvious from its style and its material, and was confirmed by the letters "U.S." in shining brass on its collars. It must once have been the property of some American serving in India. Apart from this jacket the general had permitted himself no Western touch; the rest of his dress consisted of the typical baggy pajama trousers of coarse unbleached cloth, and an impressive khaki turban adorned by a colorful plume of feathers from a cock pheasant. Though others around him smoked cigarettes, the general considered this effeminate, and stuck to his hookah, or hubble-bubble, which was carried by a special orderly wherever the general went. Half of the general's

army carried rifles and automatic weapons, but the remainder including the general disdained anything but their handmade swords.

A few weeks earlier, this mixed force of rifles and swords had attacked an Indian supply convoy with terrible effect. They had chosen a tortuous stretch of narrow mountain road with vulnerable bridges at either end, and when the unsuspecting convoy was strung out here, they had trapped it by blowing up the two bridges. The convoy had an escort of three armored cars, but on the narrow road they were unable to shift their position, and because of sharp curves they could give no protection outside their immediate vicinity. Those left unprotected were killed or captured immediately. The others huddled round the armored cars during daylight, but were dealt with at leisure during the night, falling victims to the swordsmen. The armored cars held out for some days with their hatches closed, but their inmates were eventually driven out by thirst and had to pay forfeit to cold steel. The guerrillas captured enough arms and ammunition for fifty further ambushes.

The mane was not the only point of resemblance between the general and a lion. There were others. The general slept in the same dress in which he worked; he took what he needed from his kill, leaving the rest of the carcass where it lay. Half-rotten bodies of Hindu and Sikh soldiers stripped of their clothes were lying all around the general's headquarters when we reached there. Inside the general's dugout I was given the corner of honor as his personal guest. In the same corner lay the severed head of a calf, the rest of which must have formed the general's rations during his journey to the capital. That head sat firmly on the ground, glued there by a large clot of black blood, its ears pointing oddly in different directions, its eyes open in a bewildered stare, its teeth closed in a tight bite on its protruding tongue. As long as we were awake I kept my eyes away from it, but I could not do that to my thoughts when the

lights had been put out. Now my fevered mind ran wild, and with good justification; for about midnight the calf woke me up with its loud bellowing. I sat up in a cold sweat of terror, and was about to rush out of the room when I realized that it was only the general snoring loudly.

"Come back soon," said the general, as I got ready to leave the next day.

"Certainly," I replied, shuddering at the thought of more nightmares, though wanting to do something quickly for his gallant followers. Maula Bux and my escort were not yet ready, but in my anxiety to get away from that calf's head, I decided not to wait for them. "You will catch up with me soon," I told them, and pushed off.

After a night in that musty dugout, the clean open air was a tonic. I breathed it in deep gulps and moved along at a brisk pace, my mind busy with the problems of medical relief. The problems looked easy now that I had seen things for myself. I had been welcomed everywhere. The best houses in the area had been vacated for use as hospitals. Whatever I needed and was available was given me for the asking. Grain and milk and chickens and eggs, and a hundred other things had been offered me in large quantities. Among the Azad Kashmir fighters were many who had acquired a variety of skills in medical establishments in World War II. As many of them as I needed would be ready volunteers. All this was wonderful, though some things would still have to come from outside: specialists, doctors, X-rays and surgical equipment, drugs and dressings. But it should not take long to set up an emergency medical service. I felt cheerful, and was about to burst into song, when I turned a corner and ran into a ragged group of Pathan tribesmen.

A large wooden box of rough workmanship lay in the middle of the path, obviously a coffin with a dead body in it. Alongside it, and strung out on the path, were the six companions of the dead man, hawk-eyed, fierce-looking, armed with rifles

and swords. Some of them carried two rifles each. There were six large bundles tied up with strings, containing their worldly possessions and their share of war booty. The dead body was being carried home to be buried in the family graveyard as required by inflexible tribal law.

We exchanged greetings and I expressed my sorrow at their loss. The expression of sympathy was ignored. "Come and help in carrying the coffin to the next village" was the gruff reply. "One of us is not feeling well."

"You must excuse me," I said. "I am going the other way, and I am in a hurry."

"So are we. And if you want to save your time, do what you are told."

I could see from their grim faces that it would be dangerous to trifle with them. Quietly I bowed to the inevitable, and even tried to pretend that I was doing it willingly. This may have helped, for at least I was not asked to carry the sick man's baggage; but perhaps he did not trust me with it.

Even though I was carrying less load, the pace of the others was too hot for me. "Faster, faster," they would say every now and again. "You are deliberately spoiling our rhythm." This was not true, though apart from my lesser physical strength, I had another reason for going slow. The tribesmen would retrace my steps for about two miles, and would then take a different path. If we did not meet my escort before the parting of the ways, we would miss them completely. My whole program would be thrown into confusion. And if the next village was further than my physical endurance would take me there was no knowing what these ruthless tribesmen might do.

We reached the parting of the ways, and I begged for a brief halt. This was granted, more because there was a stream of cool clear water where all of us took a drink. I was even allowed extra time to wash the sweat and caked dust from my face and hands.

"I have no strength to go further," I now said truthfully, as I was nudged to get up and start.

"You will have to. Hurry up."

"If we wait here a little, someone stronger is sure to turn up soon, and I will gladly pay him to take my place."

"Have you much money?"

"Not much, but you can have it all." I took out my purse and handed it over. Its contents were taken out and counted carefully. They were impressed by the amount. "Perhaps you would like to have my watch also," I added, taking it slowly off my wrist. They looked at it critically, one by one, fascinated by the rapid sweep of the large red second hand. One of them put it to his ears and listened to the ticking. "It shines in the dark," I told him. This statement he put to the test by holding the watch in the cupped palms of his two hands. They now held a brief consultation, but to my surprise they handed me back the money and the watch. "We cannot take your things," they said. "You are a brother in faith. Go your own way, quickly, before we change our mind."

I continued to stand there. They lifted the coffin and were soon out of sight. Not long afterward my escort arrived. I sent two of them to catch up with the Pathans and help them to the next village.

Our last place of call was the thrice-destroyed city of Mirpur. At the start of the popular uprising the Muslims of Mirpur had suffered grimly at the hands of the maharaja's Hindu troops and police. After these troops had been driven out, the Hindus were plundered and massacred by the enraged Muslims. Later had come Indian planes to bomb the place with high explosives and incendiaries.

I had heard sickening reports of the atrocities committed on each other at Mirpur by Hindus and Muslims and we now saw horrible confirmation of these accounts. The town had been reduced to a formless heap of rubble with only an occasional



indication of streets and roads. Mutilated corpses were still being dug out of the debris by hopeful vagrants looking for buried treasures. A few days earlier they had made a ghastly find which had whetted their appetites. In the wealthy part of the town they had found an open well full of dead female bodies all laden with valuable jewelry. They were dressed in their finest silks. What had happened was not known, but perhaps in a grand gesture of preferring death to dishonor, these women had plunged hand in hand into this watery grave.

## CHAPTER XX

### *The Truce*

IN LESS THAN A MONTH a skeleton medical service was working in Azad Kashmir. Help came from unexpected quarters: surgeons who insisted on going to dangerous forward areas and refused to take either pay or expenses; gifts of clothing, blankets, bandages and a hundred other things from merchants in Rawalpindi, Lahore and Karachi; a radiogramophone from a kind British lady sent five thousand miles by air at her own expense; groups of college students who volunteered to take turns at office work. I had seen much in the fighting in Kashmir that was sickeningly inhuman and evil, enough to make me despair of mankind. Now I saw much more that was good and kind, and I regained a sense of proportion. I was humbled and inspired by the selfless dedication of many with whom I was in daily contact.

I had now entered into a busy and complicated double life. At Rawalpindi there was the dignified office with carpets and telephones, and the comings and goings of generals with high salaries, dull personalities and profound military knowledge. Things were secure and predictable. One arranged business meetings and dinner parties for the next week or the next month with confidence. With four healthy children our six-room house seemed cramped, but Qamar had made it a haven of comfort. We had few luxuries, but we had a car and a refrigerator and every necessity of gracious living.

Azad Kashmir was another world. My office there was a light brief case, which Maula Bux carried wherever we went. The generals there were ignorant of high strategy, though each one

had some unique quality of leadership which made him interesting as a person and stimulating as a companion. Day after day could pass uneventfully, but we could turn a corner unsuspectingly and be right in the middle of a tragic drama. One late afternoon on a narrow path on the bare leeward side of a steep hill we played hide and seek for an hour with an Indian fighter plane. It fired at us many times, but we escaped without a scratch. Another group, well hidden in a forest area a few miles further on, was not so lucky. They suffered badly when the plane blindly dumped its bombs to return to its base at sunset.

The wounded were carried by their companions to a nearby improvised aid post in a pine grove on a low hill. As we arrived an open-air operation was in progress. I knew the surgeon, Shaukat Hassan; I had interviewed him at length a few days earlier when he had volunteered to work in Azad Kashmir. I am a good judge of men and their ways, and I had easily realized the shortcomings of the new volunteer. The flabbiness in his heavy build was obvious; his large hands were bound to be clumsy. There was dullness in the look in his eyes, slowness in his deliberate speech and gestures. He was too soft for the rugged life involved. I had accepted him reluctantly, only because our need for doctors was desperate.

Now I watched him at work with critical eyes, ready to give useful hints on emergency surgery to this unpromising novice. But quickly came the shocked realization that I, not Shaukat, was the pupil. I was amazed at his delicacy of touch, at the deft precision of his sensitive hands. He had been operating all day, but he showed no signs of fatigue. Unhurried but alert and lively, confident but not rash, he was the picture of competent surgical skill. I stood there tongue-tied and humbled. Fortunately, my sense of shame was soon lost in an overpowering surge of thankfulness, and I made what silent amends I could by saying a heartfelt prayer for Shaukat. In due course he became a great surgeon. He went to London for postgraduate study, and

against the best young surgeons of the empire, he won every prize for which he was eligible. When Shahid, or one of Karamat's sons needed surgery, Shaukat was our choice as surgeon. Many in Azad Kashmir got a second lease on life because of his quiet and delicate work.

Shaukat worked that night until the early hours of the morning. There was a young boy of fifteen with a neat round hole punched through the geometric center of his forehead. He was beyond Shaukat's skill. There was a middle-aged cook, with the right side of his mouth and jaw blown away, his tongue and the inside of his throat torn and exposed to the view. Shaukat put him aside to die. Such cases needed special equipment and skill, both for the anesthetic and for surgery. But when the others had been taken care of, and the cook was still alive, Shaukat did what he could, and rushed him back to Rawalpindi. We put him on the first plane to London. Two years and twenty-two operations later, that cook returned to Pakistan and to a normal life.

During my first trips in Azad Kashmir I was like a cripple without his crutches; I was never comfortable. I was constantly aware of bad food, of poor shelter, of the lack of a hundred normal amenities. But in time I learned to do without amenities, and in doing so discovered a great new sense of freedom. I found a joy in traveling light; some added restfulness in sleeping soundly on a stony patch of ground; a new maturity in not worrying about the time and place of the next meal; a pleasant thrill at finding the crutches unnecessary.

And how delightful were those repeated home-comings to Rawalpindi. As communications with Azad Kashmir were primitive, my program could never be certain. Qamar knew the question was useless, but the children always asked about my return at the beginning of every journey. After one or two bad guesses, we agreed to divide my trips into two classes: short, less than a week; indefinite, up to a fortnight. For that much time both

sides would resolutely treat no news as good news. Beyond that period Maula Bux would come back with a message.

These unexpected returns were often in the early hours of the morning. We would race through the empty streets of the hushed, sleeping town. On entering the driveway of the house we would slow down, as I did not want to wake the children and ruin their day at school. Qamar and I had a corner room with large French windows which was half part of the house and half part of the garden. Right above its door was a luxuriant jasmine creeper with delicate white blossoms of exquisite fragrance. Qamar loved them. When I was at home she always picked a fresh bunch of these flowers before going to bed to keep under our pillows. The white flowers were clearly visible even in starlight, and as a gift for Qamar I would quickly gather a handful before quietly knocking at her door.

Sometimes in spite of every care the children would wake up. Otherwise there would be a warm reunion before the early morning prayers, and an exciting exchange of news and anecdotes until they left for school. And then, before beginning the day's work, Qamar and I would say a special prayer together, and our hearts would be equally thankful whether I had been away a day or a month.

Each home-coming brought me also a keen new pleasure in commonplace things. I found luxury in the sparkle of china and silver, the clean bed linen was a treat, the soft mattress became an indulgence. I felt pampered with the abundant hot water and the big dry towel. Merely to be with Qamar and the children was heaven. What joys I had missed by taking all these for granted.

The events in Kashmir were now of international interest, and one day I turned a corner and ran into a journalist. A woman journalist; blonde, attractive, aggressively inquisitive; her well-cut Western dress the last thing one expected to see in that wild area. Before I could recover from the surprise she had

shot her first question at me in a broad American accent.

"Do you speak English?" she asked.

"A little," I replied, making a quick compromise between truth and expediency. My mission of mercy was correct under international law, and in the accepted traditions of my profession I had taken no part in the fighting. Our medical care was available to friend and foe; to Hindu, Sikh and Muslim alike. But there was no knowing what official embarrassment this journalist might cause by reporting my identity. So I affected a broken English, unworthy of a Pakistani officer, and gave her a pseudonym which I had adopted for my Azad Kashmir life.

It was a creditable performance, but it nearly came to nought a few days later. Back in Rawalpindi a friend invited me to a party. "You must come," he insisted. "There is someone I particularly want you to meet." I went in my ceremonial military dress. The host met me at the door and immediately took me to the guest of honor: the blonde journalist.

"Colonel Ata-Ullah of General Headquarters," said my friend, introducing me.

"But you gave me a different name in Azad Kashmir," said the lady, pointing an accusing finger at me, a mischievous glint in her eyes. I could not help a flush of embarrassment, but my quick-witted host was equal to the occasion. "That must be his twin brother," he said, without batting an eye. "I am often mistaken for my brother," I added hastily, as soon as I had recovered my speech. This was true. Karamat is very like me, though three years younger.

Gradually the Azad Kashmir government was getting organized. Every time I visited their capital they were doing better in one field or another. I kept their Ministers of War and Health informed of my work. "I shall withdraw as soon as you are ready to take over," I always told them, though I was glad when they refused to let me go. Often they went further and asked

my help in other matters, leading me into Alice-in-Wonderland situations that had no place in real life.

That is how I became their paymaster general for a fortnight. The balance in their treasury had just topped the million-rupee mark. The fighters at the front had been long away from their homes and had not harvested their crops. Their families were in distress, and it was urgent to issue some "pay" quickly. When I next met the Minister of Finance, he emptied his entire treasury into my lap. "Please go and pay this to our soldiers. I cannot go myself," he said, referring to his lame leg, "and I cannot think of anyone else who has everyone's trust. We have no records of who has been in the fighting and for how long. Many have assumed inflated high ranks, and we have no official pay scales. You know the situation well, and I leave everything to your judgment."

My first thought was to refuse what was at best a distraction, at worst an invitation to become a scapegoat. But I was won over by the genuine concern of the minister. This was my first contact with a million rupees in cash, and one night with it cured me of the desire to become a millionaire myself.

I took along carefully selected volunteers, and gave each one a sealed haversack with a counted hundred thousand rupees in it. With a small armed escort, and without any advance notice, we wandered from hilltop to hilltop, and from dugout to dugout distributing largesse with utter abandon. We made handwritten records on loose sheets of paper of whom we paid how much. These we sent to the Minister of Finance, and as I never heard anything further, our accounts could not have been far wrong.

Everyone took what we gave him without argument, and even with the generals we had little difficulty. My medical work had already given me a good name in Azad Kashmir; now my stock went up sky high. As soon as I could do so with propriety, I took advantage of this and got funds from the Azad Kashmir government to buy a jeep. Even though it could not go every-

where, it enabled me to move faster than before. To be at my desk in Rawalpindi and at the same time on my beat in Azad Kashmir became a little easier, though also a little more dangerous.

That jeep was christened the "iron mule," and it soon showed an appropriate personality. Sometimes it carried twenty persons for miles without any more to-do than a few snorts. Sometimes to move it a few yards was a major engineering problem, and many times we had to turn out a whole village and drag it along. It was good on the steepest hill if you let it climb straight up or descend straight down, but as we learned on the very first journey it did not like going across a slope. On that occasion it had rolled over and over and over on barely a forty-five-degree provocation, though it had sense enough to stop right side up before the joke had gone too far. A yard more would have meant a two-thousand-foot plunge for all of us into the raging river below. One of my companions fractured his skull and was laid up for four months; the only thing we lost to the river was my change of clothing.

One night we were crossing the Bhimber river by the light of a pale moon an hour before dawn. Usually only a dry sandy bed, because of heavy rains the river had become a broad stretch of inky water. Maula Bux walked across to the other bank and returned to report that the water was only knee deep. That was safe; we were in a hurry.

When we lost motion in midstream and the wheels began to spin, we were not unduly worried. There were six of us, enough to push the jeep out of the odd slippery patch. We jumped out, put our hands and shoulders on suitable parts of the vehicle and gave a concerted heave at my call, "Ready. Push."

The jeep moved a few inches, but not forward. It moved deeper into the river bed. So did we, as the ground began to slip from under our feet. We were stuck in quicksand. One of us went off immediately to the nearest village to get help. But



he was gone a long time and soon the water started to rise perceptibly. The current became swifter, and the sand began to wash away from under the jeep. With majestic unconcern it sank slowly and by the time we had found safety on land it was to be seen no more.

Two days later we dug it out of the dry river bed, none the worse for the mishap.

There were remote mountain valleys in Kashmir where nothing had changed since the early iron age. As we arrived in the jeep many people saw a wheel for the first time in their lives. At one place I was assured by the village elders that only once before had a comparable thing happened in their valley. That was the passage of Alexander the Great. The curious would carefully examine the iron mule. "Where is its mouth?" "What does it eat?" they would ask. "Chicken and eggs" was Maula Bux's usual reply. And every now and again the hospitable villagers took him at his word and brought these to him in all seriousness.

The calls on our improvised medical service increased more rapidly than our resources. Our first concern was for those involved in the fighting, but it was hard to neglect the aged and the infirm, the women and the children in the rear areas. Not many of them became casualties from air attacks, but there was plenty of disease. Malaria, tuberculosis, goiter and dysentery were common; and when typhus threatened to become epidemic in the winter I became deeply worried. Fortunately, just when we most needed it, abundant help became available, first from the Pakistan Red Cross, and then from the Pakistan government.

Like everything else in the newly created country of Pakistan, it had taken the Red Cross months to get organized, to produce order out of the chaos of the partition. But now they brought us help in a big way. They agreed to take over and expand our hospital facilities at important communication centers in the

rear. We became free to concentrate on the forward areas, and on control of epidemics in the countryside.

The Red Cross came none too soon, for the fighting in Kashmir now reached a new pitch of intensity. Strong fresh formations of the Indian Army launched a determined attack to bring the frustrating conflict to a quick end. But the quick end did not come, for the guerrillas were reinforced by detachments of the Pakistan Army, which hesitantly entered Kashmir after watching the unequal struggle for months from the side lines. India and Pakistan were now at war in Kashmir, even though they remained nominally at peace in the plains of the sub-continent. Their two armies had been a single army only a year before. Comrades trained together, sworn to die for each other, were now thirsting for each other's blood. It seemed like fratricide.

With the Pakistan Army directly involved, I began to spend most of my time in Kashmir and gave up my desk at General Headquarters. It was no longer necessary to avoid inquisitive journalists. I was even glad to show them around. Many of them were impressed by the achievements of the Azad Kashmir medical services, and it may have been their reports which led to my being called one day by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. He inquired about our work in detail and listened to my account with deep sympathy. "How can I help?" he asked when I had finished.

"You know, sir," I replied, "that under the maharaja's rule even elementary medical facilities were nonexistent. We have made poor makeshift arrangements, mostly in tents or mud houses."

"Can't you do more?"

"Of course we can. With sufficient money we can provide as good a medical service in Azad Kashmir as you have in Pakistan."

"What will it cost?"

I gave a rough estimate. The Prime Minister remained silent for some time. "That is a large sum," he then said, "but work out the details, and we will discuss them when I come here next. I intend coming to Rawalpindi about once a fortnight, and I want to see you each time I am here."

I knew I would get that money, and perhaps even more. This was a long way from that Friday afternoon when I had gone round collecting discarded surgical instruments for the deceased young doctor. My heart was bursting with thankfulness, and I rushed home to give the good news to Qamar.

A few months later, the shooting war in Kashmir came to an end under a cease-fire arranged by the United Nations. This was to be followed by a free vote of the people of Kashmir to decide whether they would join India or Pakistan. It was an uneasy truce. But with the abundant resources made available by the Prime Minister, it was now possible to deal with the health and medical problems on a sound permanent basis. I received the support and good will of the governments of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir, and of my superiors in the Pakistan Army. I settled down in a neat new office to a life so happy and so busy that I lost all awareness of time as month after month flew by.

The happiness of my official life was exceeded by the happiness at home when our daughter Durre Sameen was born. Months before any addition to the family, Qamar would become engrossed in preparing a royal welcome for the newcomer. She would spend hours in choosing the right shade of baby wool and in selecting knitting patterns from her encyclopedic collection of women's books and magazines. The old pram and the baby cot would be cleaned and done up, fresh stocks laid in of special soaps and dusting powders, mysterious additions made to the household medicine box. And well in advance of the baby's birth, she would select and announce two names: one a boy's and one a girl's.

With the birth of four successive sons, her choice of good boy's names had run out. But Durre Sameen, Precious Pearl, had been ready and waiting for many years as a wonderful name for a daughter. When Qamar announced that this time there would be no second selection, I was horrified at the risk involved. If providence did not conform to Qamar's decision in the matter of sex, we were committed to giving a girl's name to a son. Durre was therefore doubly welcome. She was our only daughter, and she saved us from serious embarrassment.

The fighting in Kashmir having ended, the Azad Kashmir government had no further need to hide in the forests of Trarkhel. They moved their capital to the old city of Muzaffarabad. Here we built a modern hospital in record time. We found a magnificent site on a rocky peninsula, topped by an undulating grassy meadow, studded with clumps of eucalyptus and poplar trees. Three sides of this peninsula ended in sheer two-hundred-foot walls which formed the left bank of the graceful curve of the Neelam River just above its junction with the Jhelum. I loved that spot, and found it fascinating to watch the two rivers flow into each other. The narrow Neelam, blue and clean and frothing white, tumbling and tossing over the shallow boulder-strewn bed; the broad Jhelum, glum, silent, murky brown, laden heavy with silt, its big whirlpools showing its menacing depths.

There is a legend that Shah Jehan, the Moghul builder of the Taj Mahal, had been so charmed with the beauty of the Neelam that he had given it the second name of Nen-Sukh, Delight of the Eyes. As if still conscious of the imperial tribute, the Neelam remains resentful of the embrace of the Jhelum, and stays on its own side of their common bed for a long time. The blue and brown streams flow parallel and do not merge until nearly a mile from where they first meet.

We put the best of everything we could get in the Muzaffarabad hospital. We bought things not available at that time even

in the university hospitals, such as equipment for the medical use of atomic radioisotopes. Many who came to visit us went away admiring friends, and later helped us with gifts and donations and other forms of practical encouragement. Large unclaimed sums were lying with various officials as the aftermath of the partition troubles. From these we got a million rupees with which to begin an endowment fund. The International Red Cross in Switzerland sent us a sizable quantity of surgical instruments and X-ray sets.

One of our visitors was the British lady who sent the radio-gramophone by air freight. "What do you think of our equipment?" I asked her after she had been shown around by one of my doctors. I expected compliments on my administrative ability, and was ready with suitable protestations of modesty, but she deflated me with her reply. "I did not notice anything particular about the equipment," she said, "but I noticed something that your formal inspection may have missed. That is the deep humanity of the hospital staff, such as is rarely seen these days."

She had found out what had been kept a secret from me. Some months earlier a father and his eight-year-old son had been brought to the hospital, both badly mauled by a black bear in the forests of the Neelam valley. They had no other relations and when the old man died, the boy was left alone in the world. The official care of the orphan was a matter for the local magistrate, but the doctors had decided to keep this privilege for themselves. They had found the boy a suitable home and had undertaken to pay for his education so that he would not be a burden to his foster parents. They had done similar things for other patients in distress, beyond the call of duty, beyond merely curing bodily illnesses.

Modern medicine is complex, and it takes years of teamwork to develop its higher skills. Most of our doctors were young and relatively inexperienced, but their kindness and devotion to

those in their charge brought them patients from far and wide. Some came secretly even from the Indian-occupied areas across the cease-fire line. In the words of the governor of West Pakistan, Azad Kashmir soon had better medical cover than his own rich province.

Though Muzaffarabad was our major effort, other places were not neglected. The thrice-destroyed town of Mirpur was slowly rising from its ashes, and we gave it a hospital almost as good as the one at Muzaffarabad. And as funds became available, we built small clinics and health centers in the outlying parts. But what gave most satisfaction was our work in what was known as the Northern Area.

This is a vast mountainous region of snow-bound peaks and mighty glaciers, inhospitable, inaccessible, rugged beyond description. More than half of its forty thousand square miles still remains untrodden by the foot of man. It is the north-western end of the Himalaya-Karakoram belt of lofty rock, which nature has flung across Asia like a great backbone to the earth. Here come together Russia, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the frontiers often vague and undemarcated; and here rise many of the world's highest mountains. Among these are K2, second in height only to Mount Everest, and others like Nanga Parbat, Rakaposhi, Haramosh and Falchan Kangri.

This was our problem area, with its big distances, poor communications and widely dispersed population. Only two places in it had been made accessible by emergency landing strips: Gilgit with a population of four thousand and Skardu with only half as many inhabitants. Gilgit is the gateway to the Hunza valley; Skardu is the starting point for most of the mountaineering expeditions into the Karakorams. They are only overgrown villages, but they are the shopping centers of the Northern Area. The ordinary shopping trip for many is a fortnight's walk each way for the chance to barter a sack of grain for some cloth

or salt or matches. Normal trade with these places is still by mule caravans, which take a fortnight or more for the perilous journey over high mountain passes that are blocked for seven months each year. The air journey of about an hour is possible only in perfect weather. You fly at fifteen thousand feet, and you are still in a canyon; while your wing tips scrape at the middle heights of twenty-five-thousand-foot mountains on either side. Underneath you rushes the Indus River twisting and turning in its deep gorge, and you twist and turn with it. It is easily the most spectacular flight in the world.

The sick of the Northern Area could not easily come to our medical service, so we sent the medical service to them. We set up hospitals at Gilgit and Skardu, and from these bases medical teams traveled all over the area. In winter some of the snowbound places could communicate with us by portable radio. In cases of emergency we made our diagnoses from their broadcast messages and dropped medicines and instructions by plane.

In the happy and grateful communities of Gilgit and Skardu we could not remain mere doctors. We had to put electric generators in our hospitals, but before we knew what we were doing we had also been persuaded to light the village streets, and become their electrical engineers. On one of my trips I showed some 16-mm. films to a few friends, and on my next visit I was met by the entire population of the valley clamoring for a show. Many had walked five days to see the first cinema of their lives. They watched the film. I watched them, and my own thrill was no less than their spontaneous, childlike pleasure. Soon the hospital was running a weekly movie theater in a mud-walled hall put up at no cost.

Two years went by in this manner, almost unnoticed, before there was a minor change of scene. A kind friend in a high official position offered me a six-week assignment that took me

to the Far East, inviting me to join a study and planning group that would visit community development programs then under way in India and Japan. This was a prelude to Pakistan's own ambitious plans in the same field.



## CHAPTER XXI

### *Korea*

AFTER BRIEF HALTS at Delhi, Calcutta, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Okinawa, we touched down at Haneda, the airport for Tokyo. It was like going to a strange new world. All my previous journeys had been westward, into the Middle East and Europe, but in these places I had not felt an alien even on first arrival. In a sense a Muslim is at home from Indonesia to Tangier, but I had felt a similar kinship also in the Christian West.

My emotional attitude to other peoples and distant lands comes from the happy starlit evenings of my childhood, through mother's bedtime stories. These were more about everyone's common humanity than about wars and conflicts. She never talked of the Crusades, but often talked with love and reverence about Jesus and the Hebrew prophets. As Muslims, Qamar and I do not consider our religious duty complete without the prayers prescribed by Islam, but we have often been deeply moved in a Christian church.

There were many other points of contact with the Middle East and Europe. My mother tongue, Urdu, is derived from Arabic and Persian roots and is written in the same familiar script. In Germany, France and other European countries, though I did not know the local language, I could at least read shop signs and street names, and make intelligent guesses about newspaper headlines. But Japan was different: utterly strange dress, features so unfamiliar that it was difficult to tell people apart, speech and writing so strange that I felt illiterate and lost.

Who can doubt that the human capacity for learning is at its

best at birth and declines continuously thereafter? We learn more in the first day of our life than in the succeeding year, and more in that one year than in the rest of our days until death. To cry and attract attention, to live by the breath of our own lungs and the beat of our own heart, to suck at our mother's breasts, to make the first use of our eyes and ears; these and many such achievements are taken in our stride in one day. Before a year is out, we have learned to speak, to wander merely for the sake of wandering, to suffer and remain obstinate, to sob in anguish, to laugh in joy, to love and to tell of it more convincingly with the eyes than can ever be done in words. What we learn later on are trivial things in comparison, but we get more out of these also if we can wonder and marvel at them like a child.

The unfamiliar beauty of Japan took me back to this childhood mood. In their native costumes, these were not men and women, they were dolls. That was why they lived in neat wood-and-paper houses, grew their crops in small and dainty fields, gave trees in their miniature gardens unbelievable new shapes, had divided up their country into a hundred islands rather than have a compact land mass, had carved the unreal symmetry of the Fujiyama. Their paintings, music, drama had a bewildering freshness; their unhurried tea ceremony was a fine new way of seeking inner repose, and a good remedy for the unsettling effects of industrial fever. Their reverent approach to flowers opened a new window in my soul; every flower now seems infinitely more beautiful, every branch and twig seems to talk and sing.

I also saw much of professional interest, both in the Japanese medical institutions and in the United States Army hospitals. Here were patients wounded only the day before on the Korean battlefields and flown into Tokyo immediately. I heard of some remarkable advances in military medicine, and, being so near, it seemed a shame not to go to Korea and see them for myself.

But I had no official status, and visits to Korea were strictly controlled: no sightseers at all, officials only from countries with contingents in Korea. Pakistan had sent no troops there, though we had made contributions of food supplies.

Armed with a thick skin, an intense desire to go to Korea and the best introductions that I could get locally, I presented myself hopefully at the office of General Mark Clark at Pershing Heights. I was shown into the room of the colonel who dealt with these matters. He read my application, then read out the rules. These were clear: I could not go.

I kept sitting there, silent, dejected. The colonel must have noticed this. "Have you come all the way from your country to visit Korea?" he asked sympathetically.

"Yes," I replied—"and I hope that will melt your heart, even though it is not the truth."

This was not meant to be funny. I had merely changed my mind halfway through the sentence. I got up to take leave. "Thank you for your courtesy," I said. "I appreciate that your hands are tied." But before we had shaken hands and parted, his brow puckered visibly in deep thought. "Why don't you wait and let me check on a new idea?" he said.

He came back after an hour beaming with a broad smile. "That was a brain wave of mine," he announced. "A little camouflage will do the trick." He made me fill out a new form. Somewhere in the first form I had written in: "Pakistan Armed Forces." I now wrote in that place: "British Commonwealth Armed Forces." The next afternoon, in an American Army transport plane, I was flown into Seoul, Korea.

I spent one week in Korea, in the area of the American I Corps, then holding the left of the United Nations line. "What do you want to see?" I was asked on arrival. "I would like to go to some forward posts," I said, "and from there be taken back step by step as if I had been wounded." This was agreed to, and I soon embarked on a tour of the forward positions of the 1st

Commonwealth Division, and later of the United States Army's 2nd Division.

I was confined to the safety of communication trenches, of which there were miles and miles linking the tactically important features in the hilly countryside. It was a relatively static period, with occasional bursts of artillery duels. My only excitement was a visit to an outpost that had been the scene of a fanatical Communist attack and hand-to-hand combat the night before.

I spent much time at every type of medical unit, from the small aid posts in the front line to the superbly equipped hospitals in the rear. Everything was better than the best I had seen before, and so were the results. The Korean death rate from war wounds was only half of what it had been in the most favorable periods of World War II. There were elaborate laboratories conducting fascinating scientific research under difficult field conditions. One problem being studied was the cause and cure of frostbite. This condition had crippled thousands of United Nations troops in the first winter of the Korean campaign, but was now under complete check. Many parts of Azad Kashmir have severe subzero winter temperatures like Korea's, and I learned many lessons of immediate practical use. In this and in other ways, I was quickly brought up to date on major professional advances.

The superb medical institutions were not the only signs of the great material wealth of the United States: this was equally evident from the dress, food, amenities and living conditions of the American soldiers. At the time of my visit the Imjin River was frozen: outside temperatures were sometimes twenty below zero. But most of the huts, tents and caravans were warm and comfortable; and comfort and warmth by American standards meant that you could work in shirt sleeves and enjoy your ice cream. I was told that the Communists were fighting under hard primitive conditions, but whether a standard of living

much higher than your enemy's was a source of strength or weakness in the grim game of war, I could not judge.

I received generous hospitality, and talked and discussed everything freely with my hosts. They were justifiably proud of their technological achievements, of their increasingly successful conquest of disease, of their growing mastery of the physical environment. But deep down in many minds was anxiety, uneasiness and bewilderment. How had it come about that they were fighting the Chinese when for over a generation China had been their traditional ally? Only yesterday, as the teammates of the Russians, they had forced the Germans and the Japanese to unconditional surrender. Was it reality, or a nightmare, that the Russians were now their enemies to death, the Germans and the Japanese their friends? If Communism was an evil thing, why was it going from success to success? Why had the forces of freedom lost the initiative? Where would their retreat end?

After six thought-provoking weeks in Japan and Korea, I returned to Rawalpindi, glad to be back with Qamar and the children. "What was it like?" asked Qamar. "In this age of dull uniformity, it was like being in a new world," I said. "It is a pity there are so few places left where one can get that feeling."

I was talking out of turn, for five months later I was in a real new world, compared to which colorful Japan and wartorn Korea were like the family back yard. And this new world was right at our doorstep.

## CHAPTER XXII

### *Houston's Letter*

EVERY DAY in a hundred countries of the world, an uncountable number of letters are delivered at a million addresses through the post. Man is an ordinary animal, and naturally his letters are ordinary things of no importance. Pick up the entire world's mail on any day, and you will find every letter dull and useless.

All of them, except one.

Once each day, somewhere, to some fortunate person, is delivered the one letter that proves that the post is a divine institution. This letter, too, may seem to have been written by one ordinary mortal to another, but in reality it has been inspired by the angels; and when in your own turn you receive it, your life will undergo a transformation both rich and strange.

I had learned this from mother at the age of five. Whatever she said made sense, it carried immediate conviction. That is more than I can say about what I have been taught since then.

Every time she saw the postman approaching, mother's eyes would light up with expectancy. I would tug at her sleeves as she read the mail, and would ask eagerly, "Is it our turn today?"

"Not today," she would reply unruffled, "but we must not lose heart."

As I grew up, and began receiving an occasional letter myself, my heart too formed the habit of missing a beat whenever I saw the postman. In time the letters came in increasing numbers, though year after year they remained ordinary things of no importance. But I never lost heart.

And then, on Saturday, February 7, 1953, the postman handed me this letter, and proved that mother was always right:

AMERICAN ALPINE CLUB  
THIRD KARAKORAM EXPEDITION  
K 2 1953

Dr. Charles S. Houston  
Robert H. Bates  
Exeter, N. H.  
January 27, 1953

Dear Colonel Ata-Ullah,

I had the pleasure of dining recently with Mr. Aftab of the Pakistan Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and we discussed our forthcoming mountaineering expedition which your Government has kindly permitted to attempt the ascent of K2.

When I mentioned our desire to add a Pakistani to the party, Aftab immediately suggested that you might accompany us; and it is with this in mind that I am writing. The party will consist of eight climbers, and we hope to arrive in Karachi about May 28. We will proceed by train to Rawalpindi, and fly from there to Skardu. We intend leaving Skardu about June 4 for the two weeks' march to the foot of K2, and we plan to set up our Base Camp there at a height of 16,600 feet. The objective of the party is to climb the mountain, and we have no other plans that may interfere with this.

If there is a possibility of your accompanying us I should be glad to hear from you.

Sincerely yours,  
CHARLES S. HOUSTON

Aftab is one of my best friends. An irresistible leaning toward practical jokes is his most endearing characteristic. But surely he was carrying the thing too far. K2 was the second highest mountain in the world; only eight hundred feet lower than Everest. I was no longer young. I was fifty, and two stones overweight. Many years earlier I had been forced to give up tennis because of trouble with my knees. I know I should have explained all this to Houston, and politely excused myself, but

as I reread the reply I gave him, I realized that I was no longer master of my own fate:

DIRECTORATE OF HEALTH SERVICES  
MINISTRY OF KASHMIR AFFAIRS  
Rawalpindi, February 7, 1953

Dear Doctor Houston,

I am grateful for your invitation to become a member of the Third Karakoram Expedition of the American Alpine Club, which is to climb K2 this summer. I love mountains, but it has never occurred to me to climb a high peak myself, though I have always been interested in the expeditions that have from time to time made attempts on Everest and the other high mountains of this sub-continent. And although the spirit is willing, almost anxious to join you, my age and physique would not permit me to do much. Of technical mountaineering, I have no experience or knowledge whatsoever.

Having made quite clear that it will be entirely under false pretenses, I accept your gracious invitation to become a member of your party.

Yours sincerely,  
M. ATA-ULLAH

I felt proud of that reply; it put the ball cleanly back into the opponent's court. Aftab would not be able to say that I had not measured up to a challenging opportunity; and Houston, not wanting to be encumbered with a novice, would oblige me by conveniently forgetting the invitation. These expeditions are deadly serious affairs, and probably Houston's letter was only a polite way of making local contacts.

Later in the day, I mentioned the letter at home with an air of pretended nonchalance. The children were thrilled. Each of them wanted to join the expedition, and was determined to climb all the way to the top. None of them had the slightest doubt that their father would climb even higher. Qamar remarked quietly that I was already committed to important official duties over the next six months, and she dismissed the



subject with a few pungent remarks about Aftab. I nodded in vague assent, but in my heart I knew that the die had been cast.

The days that followed are hard to describe. We sat down to breakfast next morning in a charged atmosphere. Qamar was unusually quiet. The children were bubbling over with excitement. I was feeling half naked in my self-consciousness.

"Daddy," asked Anis, "after you have climbed K<sub>2</sub>, why don't you try Everest next summer?"

"Now, Anis," I answered firmly, "how often am I to tell you that nothing is settled yet? The expedition will last nearly three months, and I doubt if I can get that much leave. Until I hear again from Houston you are not to talk on this subject to anyone outside the house."

"Nor to anyone inside the house, please," added Qamar. "This joke has gone far enough. It must now stop."

The loud hooting of the school bus on the street outside saved the situation from deteriorating further. There was a scramble for the school bags, which the children announced gleefully were to be known as rucksacks from now on. They hurled themselves out the spring doors and were soon whisked away.

There was a long awkward silence before I spoke again. "Why do you upset yourself without cause, Qamar? Nothing is likely to come of this invitation, but it will be fun getting to know these people at close quarters. They are sure to hit newspaper headlines round the world."

"I hope it is no more than that," she replied, "but if it is, then please tell me soon what things you want got ready. Don't let us get into another last-minute rush."

"There is nothing to get ready that I can think of," I said sheepishly, "or at least, nothing beyond some autograph books for the children."

My work at the office that day was not of high quality. When I reached home in the evening, although I had done little work,

I was tired and preoccupied. It was quite some time before I became aware of what must be unusual in any household with five healthy children. Much earlier than they need have been, they were deeply engrossed in their books.

This study hour was not only uncommonly early; it had other unorthodox qualities about it. A large number of books lay in a heap in the middle of the room. Lying around the books in a circle, like the unequal spokes of an eccentric wheel, were the four boys and their little sister, all stretched out on their stomachs on the pale-yellow Isfahan carpet. Their upturned legs waved about in a careless rhythm, radiating a contented excitement like the wagging tail of a happy dog. This was most unexpected. The scene had none of that reluctant joyless air invariable in their homework hour.

I was greeted in a chorus as they all sprang to their feet. "Hello, daddy, look at these books we have brought for you."

Immediately half a dozen books were thrust into my hands: *Annapurna, Five Miles High, The Story of Everest, The Ascent of Nanda Devi* and others on the same subject. In short, here were all the books on mountaineering to be found in Rawalpindi. The neighbors across the road had a complete set of *The Himalayan Journals*. The entire fifteen volumes were now littered in front of me.

During the next three months I received vigorous coaching in the theory, practice and history of mountaineering from these five enthusiasts. Soon, even Qamar had to bow to the fact that this had become the all-absorbing topic in the house and that nothing could be done about it. Some of the talk was not very elevating. Farid, then about eight, felt that it would not matter if I lost half my fingers through frostbite, but if I lost more I would also lose my job. But generally the debate was on a high level. The climbers, the equipment, the technique and the tactics of every recorded expedition; the why and the wherefore of the different routes on all the major peaks; the pros

and cons of the open-and-closed-circuit oxygen; the weather reports being broadcast daily over the radio to the British Everest Expedition, then halfway up the slopes of that mountain; the odds on their eventual success; the lessons of the earlier failures on K2; all these became the subjects of eagerly repeated, and childish but knowledgeable discussions.

The theory and history of mountaineering were soon learned; the jargon was even more rapidly mastered. But the practical side—beyond such simple things as tying knots with a make-believe climbing rope—was hard to arrange. The only available steep slopes in the neighborhood were the banks of a drainage ditch not far behind our house. Its crumbly earth walls were rather disappointing; they did not provide any suitable make-believe foot- and handholds. But soon someone in Rawalpindi was found to possess an actual, real ice ax. The holdless crumbly earth proved to be perfect as a make-believe ice slope. This was an unexpected stroke of good fortune, and was followed by prolonged orgies of “step-cutting” practice.

The public library of the capital city of Lahore contained additional books on mountain lore; all these we devoured eagerly. Under normal conditions all of us would have read these books with sheer unadulterated joy, but it was now discovered that Qamar, the most literary person in the family, had become allergic to good English. The children found page after page of sublime beauty, of incisive narrative, of breath-taking drama and poignant tragedy. But they begged their mother in vain to be permitted to read it aloud, and had to be content with furtive opportunities of sharing their thrills with me.

My correspondence with Houston increased. Mountain porters had to be hired, local supplies had to be bought. Houston plunged straight into these matters, completely ignoring the ball that I had put back into his court. Clearly, he was waiting to look me over before deciding whether to take me along or not. Not till then would the suspense end.

The news that I was going to K2 could not remain secret, and questions of leave and of existing official commitments got settled as if by magic. I am not sure whether I was happy or otherwise when this happened almost without formal request on my part. None of the hoped-for difficulties materialized; everyone was so determined to be helpful! I was congratulated on my good fortune, slapped enviously on the back, called a lucky dog. Why did I keep on denying it, I had brought off the wangle of a lifetime. Would I please say—just in confidence—what strings I had pulled.

I soon realized that, even with Houston's help, retreat without loss of face was now impossible. The children's gossip and the attitude of well-meaning friends had destroyed all bridges behind me. At all costs Houston must be persuaded to accept me as a member of the expedition. I must accompany them out of Rawalpindi, and must not return until they did. If necessary I must sit it out at some distant spot on their route. But Houston would hardly agree if there was any doubt about my physical fitness. Oh, for some magic way of getting rid of that excess fat!

So I set about to reduce my weight with a sense of urgency never felt in this matter before. The first essential was to get hold of bathroom scales, and this was done successfully when a complete stranger forced me to accept his professional weighing machine on loan. This had a dial two and a half feet in diameter. "It is a privilege to help the K2 Expedition," he insisted. He brought the monster along in his own truck, and as our bathroom was too small for it, he installed it in our dining room cheek by jowl with the deep freeze. It was a precision job; guaranteed to read half ounces with absolute accuracy.

The children and I made good use of that borrowed machine. On me, it soon began to exert an uncanny compulsion. I had to weigh myself every time I passed by it; before and after every meal, and a score of times throughout the day.

The details of the diet were no trouble. Over the past ten

years I had freely indulged in the hopeful hobby of getting many an expert physician to write me low-calorie diets. To keep sufficient room for maneuver, I now selected a diet with the maximum number of out-of-season foods. "This is a great nuisance," I told Qamar, "but I can eat other things you may have cooked of about the same caloric value."

This was not my first effort to diet, but this time it was different. Perhaps the fixed and fast-approaching deadline of the expedition's arrival curbed the longing to cheat myself. Perhaps it was the doing of those who burned the bridges behind me. Or was it the inspiration of those letters from across the seas in which Houston and his colleagues unfolded their plans for the great adventure ahead?

The letters had come from people I had not met, were written by hands I had never shaken. But they soon forged a deep, mysterious bond between us. These men were dedicating themselves to a great endeavor, and I would be associated with them, though only in a small way. I did not dream for myself of the summit of K2, but even their distant companionship had helped me win a victory over myself.

So, happily down to normal weight, on Thursday, May 28, I drove down to the airport and welcomed Houston and his team.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### *Apprentice Mountaineer*

AN IMPECUNIOUS YOUTH desperately wanted the emperor's daughter in marriage. "I trust," inquired a sympathetic friend, "that negotiations with the imperial household are going well?" "Yes," was the hopeful reply. "I have given my consent; therefore, the matter is half settled."

As I waited at the airport for Houston's plane to land, I wondered if my inclusion in the expedition would go beyond this half-settled stage. When the passengers alighted, I walked up to a tall person in shorts whose legs pronounced him every inch a mountaineer. "I am Ata-Ullah," I said. "I take it you are with the K2 party." "Hello, yes," he replied enthusiastically, "but come and meet Charlie Houston. He is looking for you over there. I am Bob Craig."

A moment later I met Houston, who introduced me to the others: Robert Bates, Dee Molenaar, George Bell, Arthur Gilkey, Peter Schoening, and the British member Tony Streather. Outwardly the introductions were formal; inwardly I felt as if I were being reunited with old friends. Qamar had arranged for them to stay with us, and before the day was out, they had become part of our family circle.

On arrival at the house, they were ceremoniously introduced to Vilayati. He was to be "sirdar," or leader, of the expedition's six high-altitude porters, who were all men from Hunza. With Qamar's blessings Vilayati would not only be sirdar, but expedition cook, and also my guardian angel. Qamar had put Vilayati on his honor to bring me back safe and had given him full

authority to stop me from getting into mischief.

The newspapers now were full of the expedition, and we basked in the reflected glory. The second language in Pakistani schools is the King's English, but soon the children were fluent also in the President's English. Vilayati knew neither, and yet managed lengthy discussions with everyone on many topics. As I was to see throughout the expedition, lack of a common language was no bar to friendship between persons wholeheartedly bent on a common task.

Most of the Americans were on their first visit to the East. In forty hours they had traveled from New York to Rawalpindi, flying in the isolation of the skies, with no chance of gradual adjustment. They had heard of the romance, the glamour and the mystery of the Orient; and they now started to probe it in full.

This made me uneasy. Beyond the brief novelty of the mosques and some ancient monuments, there was little for them to see, except poverty and grime, dirt and disease. I was afraid that they would be followed by insistent beggars, made sick by offensive odors. Our house in the old British residential area was free from smells and flies, but all around was much to be ashamed of, much that would be hard to explain.

But you notice only what you are actively looking for, and these men were not looking for the ugly things. They saw the colorful dresses of the simple folk who thronged the bazaars; they did not notice that the dresses were torn and dirty. Eastern people are lazy by Western standards, prone to idle away hours on purposeless gossip. This was taken as a sign of an enviable peace of mind, of a laudable detachment from material things.

"What are your plans about me?" I asked Houston as soon as we got some privacy. He explained the difficulties and dangers. "Even one mishap may kill the whole project," he said, "and if anything happens to you, I shall always carry a feeling of guilt." We had a frank discussion. "I want your success above

everything," I assured him. "If you take me along, I shall return the moment I become an embarrassment. When you say so, I shall neither argue nor ask any questions." He accepted me on that basis.

With two planeloads of baggage we made the spectacular flight to Skardu, and I found it an awe-inspiring experience even though I had done it many times before. The others too remained glued to their windows. Most of them were seeing lofty Himalayan peaks for the first time, and there is no other sight that can send a mountaineer into equal raptures. We flew close by the 26,660-foot-high Nanga Parbat, which had defied repeated German attempts to climb it, and had taken four times as many lives as Mount Everest. From books, maps and photographs we were familiar with the saga of Nanga Parbat; and as we recognized feature after feature of this hallowed ground, we pointed them out to each other in somber tones. "That is the Silver Saddle." "There is the Rakhiot Ridge." "There must be the 1937 Camp 4!" This place is sacred as the scene of the greatest tragedy of Himalayan mountaineering, where a midnight avalanche had killed sixteen persons.

I recalled that K2 was two thousand feet higher and I shuddered at the thought. I found myself saying a prayer for the German friends who were then making another assault on Nanga Parbat. But soon we were being welcomed at Skardu, where the whole town had turned out to greet us with banners, drums and music. We were met by the other five Hunza porters, and were taken in hand by the quietly competent hospital staff who had made advance arrangements for all our needs.

Beyond Skardu, relays of local coolies would carry our baggage, so we rearranged it in individual sixty-pound loads and checked it for breakages and losses. Two days later, accompanied by ninety coolies, we crossed the Indus River by ferry, and began the long approach march to base camp. The great adventure had begun.



Houston set a hot pace: up at three-thirty, one hour for packing, breakfast, striking camp and checking out the loads; on the move by first light. We usually made next camp by early afternoon, with time for leisurely washing of bodies and clothes, the writing of diaries and letters, long sessions of songs and stories, an early dinner and retreat into sleeping bags before the end of evening twilight. This was necessary. To avoid superfluous weight we had brought only a limited supply of candles and matches.

The Hunzas were called porters only because they would be paid; otherwise everyone, whether "sahib" or Hunza, had to carry loads. I was delighted that the democratic Americans and the independent Hunzas soon became good friends. The Americans were all for equality; they would pitch their own tents, fetch their own water, wash their own dishes, be the first ones up in the mornings and the last ones to go to bed after seeing that everything was in order. They were tough guys; they would look after themselves.

It is difficult to recollect when, and by what stages, they slipped from this high resolve. But before long, the Hunzas had taken charge of the Americans and relegated them to the role of indolent Grand Moghuls. Now the sahibs had a mug of hot tea thrust into their tents first thing in the morning by a wide-awake Hunza. The sahib would sip this liquid warmth slowly, and lie on in his sleeping bag until Vilayati yelled that breakfast was ready. This half hour—the rest of the camp all noise and bustle, and we still in bed—was a wonderful time of the day. A little later we would sit round a crackling fire to eat a hearty breakfast, while the tents were struck and packed and our belongings tidied up.

The Hunzas were always cheerful; the cold and the altitude did not worry them. They would put on extra socks or gloves only with reluctance, and even on snow or glacier ice they often walked about for hours in bare feet. However hard the day,

at the end of it they would still be doing something or other for our comfort.

We were now in an area where nothing had changed in centuries, as we found when we had to cross one river by a zakh, and another by a rope bridge. The zakh was a primitive five-foot raft of thirty blown-up goatskins tied between a loose bamboo framework. Numerous bubbles bore witness to the continuous leaks and a small boy rode on the raft with the whole-time duty of keeping up its buoyancy. With irritating nonchalance he would watch a sack go soft, leisurely untie the string on its neck and casually blow it up with his mouth. The river was swift and deep in the middle, near the banks it frothed and raged over its stony bed. I looked at the river and then, with mind full of misgivings, at the flimsy contraption that was to take us across. But I soon saw that its very weakness was its strength, for instead of fighting the twists and turns of the current, it yielded and bent and recovered without damage. It scraped over the stones, it spun round in the whirlpools, it gave you the fright of a lifetime, but always it managed to hold together.

The bridge was worse. Branches of local willow trees twisted unevenly together formed the ropes. These varied in thickness: at places the size of a man's thigh, at others no thicker than the arm; the ends of each strand left loose, many ready to come away at a gentle pull. Three such ropes were slung across the river, the middle one to walk on, lower than the two on either side which you used as hand rails. Heavy boulders on the banks kept the ropes uncertainly in place, but they sagged to form a shallow V. With every step, and sometimes merely with the breeze, there was a side-to-side sway. You were not to look at the raging torrent below or you would get the unnerving optical illusion that the bridge was rushing upstream. A glance downward could cause uncontrollable giddiness, and yet it was not easy to ignore the river completely. Every now and again your heart jumped into your mouth, for your foot had failed to con-

nect with the rope and you were stepping into a void. You had to look down to see if the rope was still there, and you could not fail to see the river far underneath.

A week after leaving Skardu we reached the village of Ashkole, the halfway mark of our approach march and the last inhabited place on the route. Eight days of hard going had put me in good physical condition: on my feet the blisters had formed and burst and healed; my muscles and joints had passed through stiffness and pain and were supple and loose once more; three days of stomach trouble had given place to a ravenous appetite; the itch of sunburn on face and hands had disappeared; instead of staying awake with cramps I was sleeping well; and no longer preoccupied with my own misery, I was beginning to enjoy my surroundings and learn from my companions the elements of mountaineering.

"I hope I am not being an embarrassment," I asked Houston when we reached Ashkole.

"Not so far," he replied. "But the real tests are still to come."

Three marches on the uninhabited wastes beyond Ashkole brought us to the Baltoro glacier. I had been on glaciers at lower altitudes in Azad Kashmir, and I remember the geography-book definition: slowly moving rivers of ice. But the Baltoro was no mere river; it was an ugly sea lashed by a furious storm, the chaos of its towering waves frozen into solid ice.

We were many miles away when Houston lifted his ice ax and pointed it out. "There is the snout of the Baltoro," he said. What I saw appeared to be a gigantic whale crouching in the broad valley ahead, flanked on either side by a range of jagged snow-covered mountains. The monster's forehead was a high vertical wall, dirty black in color, from below which gushed forth muddy torrents which soon joined to form the Braldu River. Massive rocks, some of them many tons in weight, lay scattered over the back of the beast. It seemed to shift its uneasy

position now and again, and many rocks would dislodge themselves from the frozen crests and hurtle down into the troughs with accompanying thunderclaps.

The closer we came, the uglier and more terrifying it looked, and a few hours later, when the expedition began its dreary climb up the snout of the Baltoro, I began to have my first doubts about the wisdom of having joined it. Because of the altitude any exertion made me breathless, and I could not avoid exertion. I struggled and slithered and slipped between crests and troughs; up and down, up and down, up and down; it seemed utterly endless. Soon we were strung out one by one in a vast wilderness of ice and rock where there were no tracks and no landmarks, only a general direction of travel. Once I lost contact with the others for an agonizing hour, and found them only because Vilayati climbed to a high spot and shouted for me. I had not gone far, but I was walking in the reverse direction, oblivious of my bearings in my preoccupation with where to put my feet.

My despondency was further increased when there was a snowstorm through which we were forced to slog on by the inexorable logistics of the undertaking. We were carrying a carefully calculated amount of food for our ninety coolies that had to last them until they got back to Ashkole. The reserves were small, meant for grave emergencies, not for mere bad weather. I reached camp full of gloomy thoughts, wet and tired and cold, half sorry and half glad at some indications that Houston would send me back the next day. But I was forgotten in other troubles when the shivering coolies also became restive and threatened to strike. Fortunately, the bright warm day that followed saved the situation for everyone.

With each day, and with every increase in altitude, the difficulties and dangers increased rapidly. Soon the dominating fact was the lack of enough oxygen. Many persons would faint in a few minutes if taken up in a plane from sea level to fifteen

thousand feet; our base camp was to be higher than that. In time our bodies would partially adjust to the new environment by learning to breathe deeper and faster, by producing billions of new red cells in the blood and in other subtle mysterious ways. But until then life was an unreality, like a queer and painful slow-motion film. The brisk pace of the earlier stages changed to a halting leaden gait; I was breathless even when sitting or lying down. My hearty appetite gave place to a distaste for what was available, even though our food was of the best both in quality and variety. I longed for the things that were not there, that had never been a part of my normal diet. Restful sleep became impossible. It took hours to get warm even in double sleeping bags, for bodily warmth comes from the chemical combination of food with oxygen, and without enough oxygen the body stays cold like a choked furnace. When sleep did come, it was disturbed again and again by the fitful saw-tooth, jerky rhythm of breathing. Fortunately, I was not alone in my discomfort; in greater or lesser degree everyone was feeling the altitude.

But in many ways I was more helpless than the others. They were familiar with the special dangers of the new environment; I was facing them for the first time. Which snow slopes were safe, which would avalanche? I might learn soon to judge the steepness of an ascent, the depth of the snow; but it seemed that the real difference was made by intangibles: the direction and strength of the wind, the temperature of the previous night, the time of the day, the amount of cloud, the angle of the sun. To understand the effect of these would need a long apprenticeship. It was the same with other things. What parts of the glacier were safe, what parts were traps for the unwary, where innocent-looking snow bridges overlay treacherous crevasses? How wet and how cold could I get without risking frostbite? How much dazzle would produce snow blindness? Where would the boots slip, where would the special soles hold firm? Where should we rope up, where step out by ourselves? I watched, I asked ques-

tions, I made tentative experiments. But when Houston saw these, he forbade me to move even a yard on my own. I obeyed without demur, for I did not want to be sent back from the fairyland into which we had now entered.

One day before base camp we reached Concordia, a vast amphitheater ringed round by towering walls, the meeting place of a dozen mighty glaciers. In every direction the horizon was filled by a famous mountain; seven summits soared to over twenty-five thousand feet, a score of others were only a little lower, not one of them yet climbed by man after half a century of effort. K2, Angelus, Falchan Kangri, Gasherbrum, Golden Throne, Chogolisa, Muztagh Tower and a profusion of other giants, all visible from one vantage point, each different from the others in architecture, different even in the rocks that made them up, which varied from the striped yellow of Marble Peak through the whites and grays and reds and browns of the others to the granite black of Mitre Peak. Carved by nature at her grandest, this was a flawless landscape; vast in extent, magnificent in conception, inspiring in its variety. In one place a whole mountain face had been sculptured as if by a giant chisel in one blow. Another place showed nature in the role of a drowsy potter who had slowly caressed his clays into whimsical dream-land shapes. In the dust-free cleanness of the air everything was sharp and clear and close at hand, and in the deeper blue of the sky was a background that heightened the beauty of it all. Terrified, yet captivated, I looked long at that scene of unparalleled splendor. Then my flagging and weary sight turned inward, and I was overpowered by a sense of insignificance and humility.

I now saw the reason for the ugly horrors of the glacier snout, for the forbidding difficulties of our route, for the lurking dangers around us. Hidden in their secluded harems in this mountain fastness were the greatest glories of God's creation. Mounting guard on the harems were the smothering avalanche,

the treacherous ice, the freezing cold: ruthless sentries with power of dealing instant death to an unworthy intruder; with duty to see that no one set foot here who did not possess in an abundant measure the spirit of adventure and the sense of high endeavor.

Late in the dismal afternoon of the nineteenth of June, in a chilling wind and a rising snowstorm, fourteen long days from Skardu, our approach march came to an end. We staggered into base camp. Even though our coolies were hardy folks, born and brought up in the rugged mountain valleys of Skardu and Ashkole, this was as far as they could safely go. The rest was up to Houston and his team.

The coolies were paid off. They shook hands all round in farewell, happy to be going back. Dubious about the wisdom of our enterprise, some even suggested in friendship that we give it up. "What do you hope to gain?" some of them asked Houston. He could only smile vaguely in reply. He asked Haji, their venerable bearded leader, to come back to base camp with forty coolies on the tenth of August to take us out. Our supplies were carefully calculated to last till then. Houston's strategy would take all the climbers continuously to higher and higher altitudes, and as he was using no artificial oxygen, they would reach the limits of physical endurance in those eight weeks, with or without success.

Houston and Bates were veterans of a previous attempt on K<sub>2</sub> made fifteen years earlier. They had then got to within three thousand feet of the top, where their supplies had run out. But they had succeeded in their main aim: the discovery of a practical route on what was considered an unclimbable mountain. We would use the same route and the same sites for the higher camps where possible.

Base camp was snugly located close to the foot of K<sub>2</sub>, just far enough to be safe from avalanches. The mountain dominated us, rising twelve thousand feet in one sweeping vertical wall;

majestic, awe-inspiring, disdainful. A hundred yards above the camp, the De Fillipi glacier cascaded down in a series of tumbling ice towers to join the bigger Godwin-Austen glacier, on which we had pitched our flimsy tents. On both sides of the camp were broad ridges of high snow *séracs*; these would partly temper the fury of the blistering winds. Underfoot was a thin layer of rocky moraine; this would let us sleep out of direct contact with the glacier ice. Close at hand was water in an ice river.

I was surprised at the amount of tea, coffee, lemonade, soup and water that we drank. I was consuming more fluid on K<sub>2</sub> than I usually do in the Sind desert in the summer. The reason was simple: the mountain air we breathed was cold and dry. From our lungs it picked up as much as it could of heat and moisture. With every breath we were chilled and dehydrated, and this was made worse by our continuous deep panting. Above base camp where there was no natural water, a major problem was to carry the fuel needed to melt large quantities of snow. At base camp we were glad for that ice river.

Arrival at base camp brought a welcome pause; and we became an intimate family of fourteen at home, instead of a large crowd restlessly on the move. Relieved of the grim struggle of keeping up with the others, I made myself useful in minor ways. There was housekeeping work, checking and rearranging of loads for the higher camps, weather reports and personal messages to be received over the expedition's radio, the weekly mail run to be organized, an occasional headache and injury to which I could minister as a doctor. This was good for my morale, which was raised to new heights by Houston a few days later.

We were breaking up after dinner in a hilarious mood, for Bob Bates had excelled himself in his songs and stories. I was about to say good night when Houston made the suggestion. "Come to Camp 1 tomorrow," he said.

Camp 1 was 1,500 feet higher. The route to it through the



ice fall of the Godwin-Austen glacier was difficult and dangerous. I had heard it described by the others, who had done it a number of times.

"I would love to, Charlie," I replied when I recovered from my surprise. "What load do you want me to carry?"

Houston thought it unwise that I carry anything. I was reluctant to use food and equipment at the higher camp without making some contribution to carrying it there. Eventually I carried a half load, and though I was nursed most of the way, the only mishap was a minor one. I fell into a crevasse through a soft snow bridge which I did not probe with my ice ax; but I was roped up with Pete, and he held me before I fell beyond my hips. It was a deep abyss, for the chunks of ice broken from its mouth took a long time to hit the bottom. I took the lesson to heart and diligently learned the rudiments of safety on a glacier.

The route to Camp 1 ran west to east over the two-mile-wide Godwin-Austen glacier. K2 lay to the north, Falchan Kangri to the south. We kept to the center of the valley as avalanches could come down from both mountains. The heavily crevassed glacier rose in a gentle slope for the first half of the way, and then steeply up to the camp. In their flow over the steep part, the frozen waters formed the ice fall.

The ice fall was a magic place that belonged to the moon and not to the earth. It began with long parallel walls getting higher and higher, like giant steps separated by cavernous passages. Here you might jump from one wall to the next or walk across on a snow bridge, there you must carefully climb up and down after laboriously hewing out niches and steps with the ice ax. Then came an area overpowering in its chaos, sublime in its beauty: gigantic formations of ice, molded and chiseled and carved into myriad shapes; pillars, spires, arches, tunnels, minarets, caves, needles, domes, canyons, plateaus; hanging and leaning and tilting at all angles as if the law of gravity had

gone to sleep. Sunbeams and shadows darted in and out of the unbelievable forms, showing them up now as white marble, now as blue ice, now as crystal glass; producing a dazzling, dancing scintillating riot of color that would have broken the heart of a rainbow.

Every time I came back from Camp 1, my relief at coming safely through the lurking dangers was mixed with a longing to visit the ice fall again. Each time there were new thrills and new beauties. Later, when under the stress of an emergency Houston reluctantly allowed me to lead a party of Hunzas through the ice fall myself, I felt that I had come of age.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### *The Abruzzi Ridge*

THE ASSAULT ON K<sub>2</sub> beyond Camp 1 was to proceed up the Abruzzi ridge, named after the Italian royal duke who had led an expedition to this area in 1909. The difficulties of the Abruzzi ridge were formidable, but were well known from the earlier attempts: dangerous snow slopes, ice-covered rock faces, treacherous cornices, precipitous ledges, narrow chimneys. Everywhere steep, in places overhanging, swept now by blizzard, now by avalanche, now by falling rock, it would succumb only foot by foot to the most skillful techniques.

Houston's team were masters of the necessary skills and techniques. These are simple in theory. Over difficult parts mountaineers work in pairs, the two partners tied to each other by a long nylon rope. Only one of them climbs at a time; the other, remaining firmly in place, braces himself suitably and "belay" his partner by paying out the rope little by little. The partners belay and climb in turn, leapfrogging past each other. A slip is rare, but it will be stopped before it can gather momentum and get out of control. This allows safe and confident climbing to the limit of one's skill. For additional safety, iron spikes with loops in their heads, called "pitons," are hammered into cracks in the rock, and the climbing rope is threaded through these loops. Where the climbing is specially difficult, rope and pitons are left in place as permanent hand rails. Steep ice and snow are climbed in the same way, though here things can sometimes be made easier by cutting steps with the ice ax.

Slowly and laboriously, I now began to learn the subtleties

of mountaineering. Soon I was finding the same aesthetic thrill and pleasure in seeing an "impossible" pitch climbed with ease as I had derived from watching "impossible" recoveries by Henry Cotton on the golf course, or Bill Tilden at Wimbledon. Repeatedly I found myself holding my breath in excitement, barely able to repress a shout in applause at the performance of my companions. More than any other sportsman does a mountaineer need a cool nerve, steady limbs, perfect rhythm, split-second timing and a dogged will. In suitable proportions, he must be a ballet dancer, a tightrope walker, a circus gymnast and a champion weight-lifter. He must be an engineer, dexterous in wielding his ice ax and piton hammer, unerring in judging the breaking strain on nylon, rock and ice. Like the lone explorers and the prehistoric sailors who braved the oceans on their rafts, he must be at home with raw nature. That he must have courage goes without saying, but equally he must know when to be cautious. His penalty for a mistake is not the loss of a game; it can be the loss of his own and of his comrade's limb or life.

The supreme strategic requirement of climbing a mountain like K2 is the setting up of a high camp within striking distance of the summit. When this has been done, the two climbers considered by the leader to be in the best physical condition will be sent up there to spend a short night, and with an early start on the following day make an all-out bid for the top. By evening they must return to the safety of that camp, with or without success. In either case they will be exhausted, so the next day they must descend to lower camps. In case of failure, a second pair will climb to the high camp, and taking advantage of the experience and preparatory work of the first assault, make another attempt to achieve victory.

The months of careful planning, the long and weary march of the coolies, the weeks of back-breaking toil on the mountain by the entire expedition—all these are directed to the one end: the

high camp to shelter the summit teams. This camp will be lonely and austere, with only the bare essentials for survival: a tent, sleeping bags, fuel, food, climbing equipment, possibly some oxygen. But even so, ten or fifteen loads may have to be carried there from the next lower camp.

This next lower camp must therefore be four or five times bigger. The two summit teams will use it; and also the other climbers who carry those ten or fifteen loads to the highest camp. Similarly, each other camp will be bigger than the one above it, down to the large and elaborate base camp at the foot of the mountain.

Like the earlier expeditions, the supply pyramid that Houston intended to set up on K2 would have nine camps. They would be suitably spaced so that a loaded person could make a return trip between adjacent camps in a normal working day. This would mean a two-thousand-foot difference in height between most of them, though Camps 4 and 5, with only five hundred feet between them, would be within shouting distance of each other. The climbing here was particularly difficult.

In ten busy days the load carrying to Camp 1 was completed without mishap. Everything needed at that camp and above it had been taken there. All of us, including the Hunzas, now shifted to Camp 1. Two of the climbers had already selected a site for Camp 2 and marked the route to it. The next stage was to carry to Camp 2 the loads needed there and beyond, and this began without delay. I could take no part in it, for I had neither the strength nor the skill. With my slow acclimatization, even the ordinary routine of life at 18,000 feet was a strain.

But there was much of absorbing interest all around, as this part of the glacier was unusually alive. We were closely surrounded by complex and dangerous crevasses, but these intrigued and did not frighten me now. New fissures and cracks appeared at all times of the day and night, accompanied sometimes with weird rumbles, at others with the musical tinkle of

falling icicles. Every now and again spectacular avalanches fell from a high plateau on the southeast face of K2. A low growl would rapidly mount to a deafening, thundering, terrifying roar; thousands of tons of ice and snow and rocky boulders would hurtle down to the glacier, and racing across its two-mile width would crash into the mountain wall on the opposite side to be crushed and scattered in all directions in a dense white mist. I could never look at these avalanches calmly; always they made me hold my breath in awe and wonder.

Due east of us, the towering circle of the mountain skyline dipped to form a pass, called Windy Gap. The area beyond Windy Gap fascinated me, and I studied it for hours on the map; perhaps, because much of it was only a blank, marked: Unsurveyed. Houston had promised to make a special trip there with me after K2 had been climbed. "The pass," he had said, "is over twenty thousand feet high, and it overlooks the most inaccessible part of Central Asia. Next only to the summit of K2, the view from Windy Gap must be the best in this area."

The focus of immediate interest, however, was the Abruzzi ridge. I knew all its important landmarks from published descriptions and photographs, and these were clearly visible from Camp 1. As my companions climbed up and down these places, I watched them for hours through powerful field glasses, and felt a great even though a vicarious thrill. But one day the thrill became frighteningly real, for Houston offered to take me to Camp 2. I knew he was doing so against his better judgment, for he made the party carry light loads in case I needed help. I carried nothing.

We roped up in the crisp and clear early dawn, the stars still scintillating above us like bright jewels. We zigzagged past deep crevasses to the edge of the glacier, hardly noticing the yawning chasms on either side of the flagged safe path. No one uttered a word; the only sound in that vast calm stillness was the crunch crunch of our heavy boots, as at each step they broke

through the surface layer of frost into the soft cushion of snow underneath. There were six of us, and separated from each other by forty or fifty feet of rope, we made a long broken line. It was like being part of a solemn procession going on some mystic pilgrimage. But I was also afraid.

Soon we were on the lateral moraine, which was a raised, uneven, stony ridge separating the glacier from the main K<sub>2</sub> massif. The loose stones constantly rolled underfoot, and I had difficulty in keeping my balance. But we did not have a long way to go on such ground, and immediately beyond was the Abruzzi ridge.

It began with a three-hundred-foot climb up a broad rock face, with easy holds for hands and feet. Dee Molenaar, who was in the lead, further slowed his already considerate pace, and before long we reached the first of the two big snow slopes that lay across our route. These extended menacingly upward for nearly five thousand feet. We made our first breathing halt here, while the fresh snow which had fallen during the night was carefully scrutinized and pronounced safe. Just then a flaming shaft of light appeared over the jagged eastern skyline, and leaping over our heads flood-lit the summit of K<sub>2</sub>. Up there the sun had risen, and instantly the day was bright.

"Ready, Ata?" asked Dee presently.

"Yes," I replied, struggling up from the rock on which I sat. After only a few steps I was as breathless as before the halt. To get more oxygen I increased my rate of respiration with conscious effort. This helped, but I could not keep it up continuously, as my mind was constantly distracted by other problems. The soft snow was firm where those ahead had walked, and if I did not follow exactly I would sink to my knees and fall. A glove would wrinkle in the palm where I held the climbing rope, or there would be a misty patch on the goggles, or I would want to scratch a trivial itch in my ear, or a sock would slip or collect a little snow next to the skin. I would be acutely con-

scious of the discomfort, but I would do nothing about it. Soon a feeling of exhaustion began to creep over me, and there were moments when I felt as if in a dream and lost to my surroundings. I saw someone look upward questioningly when a large ball of snow was dislodged from our path and, rolling over and over itself, sped to the valley below. "Faster. Don't keep everyone so long over the snow. It is dangerous," I said to myself. "I know I should not have come," I replied. "But now that I am here, it is best for everyone that I conserve my strength." "You will never reach Camp 2 alive. Listen to the pounding of your heart. Do you want to see Qamar again? Then ask them, now, to take you back," I said. "No, I won't," I almost screamed. "If you are my friend, help me and don't frighten me."

The argument ebbed and flowed. So did my physical strength. My lips would be about to say the word that would end my agony; then the resolve to go on at all cost would come surging back. It was not a soliloquy in which I was weighing the pros and cons. I was two separate persons fighting for mastery over one physical body. I can recall every word of the day-long struggle of those two persons, but little of the physical experiences.

There was a steep slab of granite covered by a thin layer of ice. I remember that, because here I slipped and fell slithering on my belly for about twenty feet. But I was neither hurt nor frightened. I knew I was well belayed, and I was glad of the much longer halt that we made there because of my fall. The next physical memory is of the relief I felt on reaching Camp 2, and of the discussion about whether I should stay there for the night. If I stayed, at least one other person would have to stay behind, and this would upset the expedition's program. I returned to Camp 1.

Subsequent trips have made me familiar with this part of the Abruzzi ridge. Camp 2 is in a sloping snow-filled bowl about six feet wide. Immediately below it is a near-vertical pitch of



seventy or eighty feet, followed by a series of steep ascents and descents over giant tooth-like projections, known as gendarmes in the mountaineer's parlance. But I have no clear memory of that day. The next thing I remember is waking up in my sleeping bag in Camp 1. My heart was still pounding away, the hardly countable pulse rate was about two hundred to the minute.

## CHAPTER XXV

### *The Storm*

THE EXPEDITION now split into two groups. The Hunzas and I worked between base camp and Camp 2. Houston and the others worked their way up the Abruzzi ridge. I found my independent role enjoyable. Twice a day I picked up weather forecasts and personal messages specially broadcast for us from Rawalpindi. On our excellent walkie-talkie sets I passed these on to the higher camps. I also kept everyone up to date on the world's doings. A truce was signed in Korea; Beria was dismissed from the Kremlin. These "world-shaking" events produced no excitement. Briefly at least we saw the world in proper perspective. Much that the human race was doing seemed trivial.

The news from the mountain was of rapid progress. Camps 3, 4 and 5 were set up, and stocked ahead of schedule. My own contrasting inactivity began to suffocate me. Houston had forbidden me to go off the marked route, but I begged him to free me of this restraint, and by continuous persistence I wore him down.

Accompanied by two Hunzas I went up the Savoia glacier. This lies along the west face of K<sub>2</sub>, which must be one of nature's most awe-inspiring spectacles. Here I had my fleeting contact with the Abominable Snowman.

The Hunzas and I had just reached the top of the Savoia ice fall. We were panting and breathless, and although the gradient had leveled off, we were still having to sit down and rest every ten minutes. It was a vast snow field where no living creature had set foot since Houston's reconnaissance of fifteen

years ago. "At this moment," I thought to myself proudly, "over this thousand square miles of the globe, there is no one else but ourselves." Suddenly, as I brought my gaze back from the mountain to the route we were following, my heart leaped into my mouth. There, right in front of me, clear and crisp on the virgin snow, were unmistakable footprints.

I stopped in my tracks. Two words reverberated in my head with the intensity of a thunderclap:

THE SNOWMAN.

I stood still, petrified. Then I motioned the Hunzas to come near. Slowly, they plodded up to where I stood. Silently, I drew their attention to the footprints.

But they remembered what I had so quickly forgotten. The footprints were my own. I had walked in that direction, alone, only ten minutes earlier during one of our halts.

On July 20, now well acclimatized, I made my second trip to Camp 2. The Hunzas and I carried the recently arrived mail, and other odds and ends that were needed higher up. Tony Streather and Art Gilkey were there to meet us. They had come down from Camp 4 the previous day.

I was eagerly looking forward to meeting them. I had not seen any of the climbers for ten days and was lonely. The Hunzas were good company, but I wanted someone with whom to talk poetry, or philosophy, or get up a heated argument about nothing in particular. I was eager to learn more details of what was happening up above. Tony and Art were due two camps higher the same afternoon, and they should have left without delay. But they must have noticed the pleasure their company was giving me, for they showed no hurry to get going. We stretched ourselves out on the rocky slope just above the camp and relaxed. By tacit consent, no one so much as glanced at his watch. It was only when the lengthening shadows could no longer be ignored that they waved good-by from the top of the narrow gully with which the route to Camp 3 began.

They disappeared from view, leaving me a solid, satisfying sense of peace, of spiritual contentment. Art, I was never to see again. When I saw Tony next, he was only a shadow of his former self.

Ten days later I got Houston's permission to visit Windy Gap. True to his undertaking to Qamar, Vilayati tried to dissuade me from making the trip, and then insisted on coming with me. We took along Hedayat, probably the toughest of the Hunzas, and reached the top of the pass after considerable difficulty, narrowly escaping one dangerous avalanche. But I felt well rewarded by the unmatched view of the distant, forbidding landscape.

"We now stand on the Central Asian watershed," I announced proudly to my companions.

"What is that, sahib?" asked Vilayati, unimpressed.

"The water from this snow," I said, stamping my right foot, "will feed the Shaksgam River, which ends in a desert in Red China. The snow under my left foot will drain into the Indus and irrigate some field in Pakistan."

The Hunzas were thrilled. Immediately they set about moving as much snow as they could from the eastern to the western side of the water divide. It was a moving gesture, though as a solution of Pakistan's water shortage it did not mean much. That snow will take fifteen hundred years to reach the Indus.

The trip back from Windy Gap was even more tiring. I reached Camp 1 utterly exhausted just before the daily weather forecast. This did little to revive me.

"Hello King Two Expedition, Hello King Two Expedition; this is Jig Peter Jig Peter calling. Here is your special weather forecast. At twenty-four thousand feet, weather will be cloudy, with occasional heavy snowfalls. Wind westerly, blowing forty to forty-five knots, occasionally gusting to hurricane velocity. Temperature between ten and five degrees Fahrenheit below zero. I repeat: At twenty-four thousand feet . . ."

These forecasts had on the whole been reliable. This was going to be bad news for Houston when I came to talk to him two hours later. I felt thoroughly depressed. Just then one of the Hunzas brought me some hot sweet tea. This revived me a little, and I wiggled into my sleeping bag. I spent the next two hours in melancholy meditation.

The warm sonorous voice of Houston was unusually clear over our wonderful walkie-talkie sets. "This is Camp 8, calling base camp. Can you hear me? Over."

"Yes, Charlie," I replied. "You are loud and clear. Give me the day's news. Over."

"Everything is fine, Ata. Bob and Tony have come up, and all eight of us are together again. Everyone is fighting fit. Did you get up to Windy Gap?"

"Yes, we did."

"Good for you. Congratulations. The weather is fouling up here. Tell me what it is going to do tomorrow. Did you hear the Pandits?"

"If the radio is right, tomorrow will be a bad day, Charlie." I gave him the forecast. He did not mind it much. "A day's enforced rest will be welcome," he remarked.

We talked on for a while longer. All eight of them so high. One more camp, and then the summit. This was good beyond expectation. Then the radio was handed round, and I exchanged a few words with the others. Their voices radiated satisfaction. No one was taking anything for granted, but there was a mood of excited confidence. I was infected by the prevailing mood, and as I surrendered my aching body to the ecstasy of a deep sleep, this one sentence, said by someone on the mountain, kept repeating itself again and again in my drowsy ears:

"Three days of good weather is all we want. Three days of good weather is all we want."

Those three days never came. Instead, news poured in over the radio of rains and floods affecting the subcontinent all the

way to the Arabian Sea a thousand miles away. Our own special reports predicted grim weather day after day, with sickening regularity. I hated having to repeat all this to Houston. It was shameful to be even a link in reporting such news

The storm made all movement impossible. We felt imprisoned, smothered, suffocated; beyond help. It was a relief to hear over the radio the familiar friendly voices of those at Camp 8. We talked to each other many times a day, even though our batteries were running dangerously low. Those radios were like a line slung across a raging sea between two sinking ships. The line was flimsy and of no practical value. But it was a balm for the spirits, and it helped to preserve our sanity.

The storm was intense, merciless, continuous. Even at base camp, we were often at the limits of our endurance. Surely, at Camp 8, a further ten thousand feet higher, no one could survive the ordeal for long. Base camp was sheltered on all sides. Camp 8 lay exposed on a precarious ridge. Its occupants must have suffered grievously. But they never winced. Houston would tell me over the radio of what they were going through in full detail. It was doubtful if they could climb any further. Retreat itself was becoming perilous. In a calm, matter-of-fact voice he would tell of tents ripped up, of stoves failing to stay lit, of inability to sleep, of snow piling higher and higher. But always and invariably, he would end up by a convincing assurance that morale remained high.

It was a privilege to be with such men. I never knew till then that even pride could bring tears to the eyes.

For a brief moment on the sixth of August, I thought their high morale was in mortal peril. Hope of attaining the summit had been abandoned the previous day. Victory had been conceded to the mountain. All they had to do now was to get back safely. Houston told me all this, and I clearly sensed the relief in his voice. When he called the next day, I was expecting a care-free lighthearted radio session with him, and with all the others.

But as he opened his set, there was a note of grim anxiety in his voice.

"This is Camp 8. Are you there, colonel?"

"Yes, Charlie. Is anything wrong?"

"I don't know. Art is not well. You are a doctor, and I want your advice."

Art Gilkey had a painfully throbbing leg. He had fainted in trying to stand up. We talked over the signs and symptoms. It was clear that a big clot had formed in his leg veins to produce a condition called thrombophlebitis. We discussed his chances of getting better, and the possible lines of treatment.

"What do you feel, Ata?" Houston eventually asked.

"I see no chance for Art; not at that altitude," I answered. "Can you bring him down to Camp 4. I might come up that far, and relieve you."

"But it is impossible to carry anyone down this route," said Houston.

I knew that too. We had often discussed the rescue technique for just such an emergency, and had usually ended up in agreement that once you got high on K<sub>2</sub>, you either walked off the mountain on your own feet, or you stayed there. And this was before the additional snow deposited by the storm.

Houston's soul must have been drained dry in the next few days. In all the annals of comradeship and heroism men could hardly have been faced with a more cruel dilemma. Gilkey rapidly developed complications in his lungs and his life was clearly forfeit. An attempt to carry him down, foredoomed to fail, would merely put to grave peril the lives of all his comrades.

And yet, the attempt had to be made. They decided on that course, without hesitation, without regrets, without second thoughts. But they were under no illusions. Houston's previous refrain of the radio sessions was still the same: "Morale remains high." But he now prefaced the words with the remark, "This is a fight for our lives, Ata."

Early on the morning of the tenth of August, Houston called me to say that Camp 8 had been struck.

"Everything is ready," he began. "We start in five minutes."

"How is the weather up there?" I asked. "It is not too good at base camp."

"It is still snowing fitfully," said Houston, "but it is now or never."

"I wish I could help," I said.

"You have helped a lot, just being there. And we will need all your prayers. Now let us synchronize our watches. What time do you make it?"

"Nine," I replied.

"I'll call you again at three. Over and out."

There was much I wanted to say, but words would not come. Anyway, he switched off abruptly. I turned to find solace in humble prayer.

The Hunzas came and sat with me on the high snow ridge outside the camp. We began our anxious vigil, waiting for Houston to call us again at three. Through the fitful snow and clouds, we would catch occasional glimpses of the steep, inhospitable slope where our comrades were fighting for their lives. We were witnessing an epic of endurance and devotion, and no stage could have been worthier in its loftiness and grandeur. The actors were all children of the West. We who watched it with concentrated souls were all from the East. Under the shadow of this grim mountain, East and West had not only met, but had been fused into one.

It is hard to put in words how we felt when Houston failed to talk to us at the appointed hour of three. Or at four, or five, or six; which, if it were at all possible, we knew he was sure to do. What could have happened? Surely this group containing some of the world's best mountaineers would not permit itself to be simultaneously overwhelmed. Houston as a leader was cautious and careful to a high degree. The radio must have failed. But



Houston had himself said that this was an extremely perilous undertaking. The storm had undoubtedly left them on the verge of physical and nervous exhaustion. Under these conditions, the surest foot might slip; the soundest judgment make mistakes. Carrying Gilkey must force them to take additional grave risks. The radio could break down, but the coincidence was ominous.

We paced up and down, we knelt in anxious prayer, we switched on the radio again and again and shouted into the mouthpiece. We tried different thoughts, but it was impossible to console ourselves with any.

Fifty long nerve-racking hours were to pass before we heard from Houston again.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### *Gilkey's Death*

THE HUNZAS and I spent the eleventh and twelfth of August making impossible plans to go up the Abruzzi ridge immediately in desperate search of our comrades. Our physical limitations were crippling, but we could not delay. Haji and forty coolies had arrived at base camp on the tenth. At half rations we had food for four days.

Mercifully, we were spared the ordeal. On the evening of August 12 Houston's feeble voice answered me from Camp 6, though for an anguished moment I could not believe my ears. Then all I could say again and again was, "Thank God, thank God." Houston's speech was jerky and confused as he told me that Art Gilkey was dead and lost; carried away by an avalanche. The others were alive; injured in an accident, frostbitten, exhausted.

I learned the details later, bit by bit, as one or the other found the courage to talk about it. His pain deadened by morphia, Gilkey had been made into a bundle in his tent and sleeping bag, to be dragged down the jagged, vicious slope. Four ropes were tied to him, held by one man ahead, one on each side and one person coming behind. Art had pulled his cap over his head, and whenever anyone had asked, "How is it going?" his answer had always been the same, "Just fine."

Foot by weary foot, forced to abandon all safety precautions, they bent their backs to the hopeless task; lunging over knee-deep snow drifts, holding back grimly over plunging abysses, numbed with the cold, frenzied by the wind in their faces,

determined to struggle for their comrade to the bitter futile end. It nearly came for them all when the inevitable mishap occurred. Bell slipped, and pulled off Streather, his companion on the rope. Neither was belaying the other. Their rope fouled the next rope, and Houston and Bates were ripped off from their unbelayed positions. Utterly helpless, the four slid down the steep slope at increasing speed.

Then a miracle happened. The crippled Gilkey was belayed from above by Schoening and tied by a side rope to Molenaar. Bates in his fall fouled this side rope. Molenaar was instantly hurled onto a rock outcrop a hundred feet further down and winded with a broken rib. But the three ropes had tangled together, and Schoening on his single belay firmly held the five falling men. Nothing even remotely comparable has been done in the entire annals of mountaineering.

No further progress was possible that day. Rucksacks, tents, gloves, sleeping bags, goggles, the walkie-talkie had been lost. Houston was suffering from concussion; how badly the others were injured had to be checked. Gilkey was secured to two ice axes and temporarily left where he lay. They would go back for him after arranging a bivouac for the night at the nearest suitable place.

They went back for him, but they searched the vast panorama in vain. There was no sign of life, only the mournful cold whistle of the wind. There was no clue to the fate of their comrade; the hand of God had taken him away. Some of them thought that there was a vague new groove on the snow slope. Had it been made by the sweep of an avalanche?

I told the Hunzas and Haji's men of Gilkey's tragic death. The deep and sincere sense of personal loss was clear on their faces. The next morning when I suggested that we should build a cairn in Gilkey's memory everyone was eager to pay his own homage by helping to raise it.

Not far from base camp was a site ideal for the purpose. For a

short distance just above the place where they meet, the Godwin-Austen and the Savoia glaciers run parallel to each other, separated only by a long, narrow, knife-edge ridge. This ridge juts well away from the shadows of the main rocky mass, and is bathed in life-giving sunshine the whole day long, forming a sanctuary for the only flower masses in that area. It was a soothing colorful oasis in a vast desert of snow and ice.

The ridge comes down in a steep slope from a satellite peak of K2 and is broken up into a cascading series of precarious terraces and platforms. We selected one of these, and on it, about two hundred feet above the glacier, we built a cairn ten feet high. Less than a month earlier, describing another place on the same mountain, Gilkey had written home, "I could not be happier anywhere." This place, which we decided to link to his eternal memory, would have evoked similar emotions in him.

The next two days saw much coming and going by us up to Camp 2. There was also much activity at base camp in anxious anticipation of the return of the climbers. Early in the afternoon of August 15, Tony Streather and Bob Bates were spotted while still a long way off. Everyone rushed up to bring them in, and to ask them about the others. They told us that the rest of the party was far behind, making slow progress because of frostbite or injuries suffered in the fall. I set out to meet them, taking along a gas lamp to light us in, in case we were benighted; as well as our solitary camp bed as an improvised stretcher. An hour later we sent up a loud shout of welcome as amidst the snow *séracs* at the foot of the glacier ice fall, we spotted some distant figures moving toward us with hesitant, unsteady gaits.

They too must have seen us, for they stopped with one accord and sat down to await our arrival. Faced with the problem of sheer survival, George Bell had exerted his frostbitten feet beyond all conceivable limits of human endurance. Craig, Molenaar and Houston, too, were only just capable of staggering along; they were casualties by all normal standards. Haji im-

mediately took joyous charge, and his men soon carried the returning climbers into camp practically on their shoulders.

In anticipation of a busy day, we crawled early into our sleeping bags. But for long into that night I lay awake with my thoughts. We would of course still be together for many a pleasant and delightful day; but in a sense the expedition had ended. How vastly different it had been from all our hopes and expectations. Under the actual conditions we met, no other group could have put up a better climbing performance. But we had not reached the summit, and results such as the world at large acclaims had not been ours. My heart went out particularly to Houston and Bates, to both of whom this expedition had been a long-awaited dream. But neither with them, nor with anyone else that night, was the mood one of regret, or sorrow, or frustration.

We were not returning empty-handed, and above all we had not failed ourselves. The mountain had forbidden us the glittering prize we had come for, but in that very process we had found treasures compared to which the summit was but gilded tinsel. The child in us shed tears of anguish; the tinsel had eluded it, he must come back for it again. But whether he came back again or not mattered little to the man in us. For him, this had been a deeply satisfying experience, such as the fates bestow on only a fortunate few; and then, never more than once in a lifetime.

Next morning, we sat down on our aluminum boxes to a peaceful breakfast, and only now did I fully realize what the mountain had done to my friends. All of them had lost much weight, and were shrunken shadows of themselves. Bell's swollen feet were a painful, ugly sight; he would not be able to stand on them for many weeks. Parts of his toes would have to be amputated, though he would be able to climb again. Molenaar had a broken rib, and both he and Craig were badly frostbitten. It hurt me to see them hobbling about. Under normal conditions

they should have been confined to a hospital bed. To avoid throwing weight on the painful parts of their feet, they moved about with disjointed gaits. But on those cruel and jagged rocks every step must have given them a stab.

Tony seemed the one least likely to forgive the mountain. In his quite British way, he was determined to win in the end, even though he had lost this particular battle. Schoening, a month ago, had seemed only a grown-up adolescent. During his stay on the mountain, he had acquired a maturity that does not come to most people in years of normal living.

Bates had changed the least; and showed few signs of the additional strain that must have been thrown on him when Houston was badly hurt in the fall. There was a more distant look in his eyes, but he still walked with that fast light step that was the despair of anyone trying to keep up with him.

Houston was unsuccessfully trying to hide the aftereffects of his fall. He had an unpleasant cough, and his chest hurt him every time he breathed. A fortnight later at the Skardu hospital, I was able to see the still-present indications of a retinal hemorrhage in one of his eyes. For many days he suffered a temporary loss of power in one of his arms. But he made light of all troubles, and tried to behave as if nothing had happened to him. In this, as in many other ways, he truly earned the right to be our leader. But he was determined never to be anything more than the first among equals.

We spent a busy morning getting ready for our long trek back. Since nearly a third of our porters would have to become litter bearers for the incapacitated George, we had to decide what baggage to abandon. Part of the decision had already been made for us by the mountain, on whose sides lay strewn many of our treasured belongings. Perhaps the most irreplaceable of them all was a much-thumbed copy of the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, which had accompanied Houston on all his ex-

peditions, and which bore the signatures of men hallowed in mountain lore.

Special fast runners were dispatched with letters and cables, giving in hurried detail an account of our last ten days. Houston wrote a letter of heartwarming condolence to Art Gilkey's family, clothing all our unspoken thoughts in inspired words of affectionate dignity. Another person then much in our minds was Dorcas Houston. She had just reached Rawalpindi after a last-minute dash across the world, and was waiting anxiously for her husband. The expedition would soon be overdue there, and in the absence of authentic news, she would be engulfed in the inevitable spate of wild local rumors about our fate. I wrote a long letter to Qamar.

By midday all details had been completed, and everyone said he was ready to start early next morning. At base camp, only one sacred task remained. So, we started out of camp in a melancholy single file, to bid farewell to the departed comrade whose body we had not found. The morning had been fine, but now it was getting windy and overcast, and large fleecy clouds were racing overhead. Their gloomy shadows weaved in and out of glacier crevasses, as we limped slowly toward the cairn. We stopped every now and again and gathered some mountain flowers to fashion a wreath, and we placed his bright aluminum box on top of the cairn, where it is visible from long distances in every direction. The national flags that it had been our hope to take to the summit now lie in that box; along with a copy of his favorite poem, and a brief inadequate tribute to his memory signed by all of us. On top of the box we laid his ice ax, there to maintain an eternal lonely vigil. Then, with bowed heads and heavy hearts, we held an impressive and simple service, accompanied by readings from the Bible.

We lingered near the cairn, taking in the glorious vistas spread out in every direction. The mighty Concordia amphitheater

lay sprawling toward the south. Far ahead, but clear in every detail, were the delicately fluted draperies of the glistening, snowy Bride Peak. Just across the Godwin-Austen glacier lay the majestically proportioned Falchan Kangri, carrying with an airy grace its crown of three noble summits. K<sub>2</sub> itself dominated the scene from the northeast, and the Abruzzi ridge was clearly silhouetted on the skyline. Crystal, Marble, Mitre and their lesser sister peaks, of lower heights but of equally breathtaking beauty, were to be seen in other directions. This surely was a place fit only for the gods; and we, who were being briefly permitted to trespass here, may ever recall this fact with conscious pride.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### *Return to K2*

NINETEEN FIFTY-THREE was a great year for Himalayan mountaineering: the year of the first ascent of Everest. K2 now became the mountaineering world's foremost objective. The enormous difficulties of this mountain had been shown once again by the tragic failure of Houston's gallant attempt. But it is the glory of man to be undaunted by heavy odds; and it was therefore no surprise when, on returning from K2, we found another expedition getting ready to continue the fifty-year-old battle of man against this mountain. This expedition would come from Italy. Its leader, Professor Ardito Desio of Milan, was already in Pakistan to make preliminary arrangements and to do a personal reconnaissance. He discussed his plans with Houston, who gave Desio much valuable information and many photographs.

Desio invited me to join him. I asked Qamar. "You must go" was her short, resigned comment. I was proud of her fortitude, but felt reluctant to put her on the rack once more. I had seen her wince the same morning when looking at some films of the ice fall and the lower parts of the Abruzzi ridge. "It was not really so bad," I had explained. "It only looks dangerous on the screen." I assured her that I had run no risks. But she was not convinced and she said so. I had been remote and inaccessible for interminable weeks; the most recent news of me always a fortnight out of date. How much could go wrong in the meantime! Her deep love had constantly tortured her with such thoughts. For those who really care, no news is bad news.

My own reaction to Desio's invitation was powerfully ambivalent. There was the possibility of accident or death, but I dreaded even more the long subjection to acute physical hardship: the constant gasping for breath, the always numb feet, the endless waiting for sleep, the cramped existence in flimsy tents, the thought that somewhere my strength of purpose might fail. Throughout our stay on K2, at one time or another every day, I had called myself a fool for having gone there. But now I was seized by a deeply powerful, almost a mystical urge to visit that fairyland once again.

I accepted Desio's invitation. I would be no burden to him, and I might even be of help. I subdued my qualms about Qamar's ordeal, though an underlying feeling of guilt remained.

Desio was a mountaineer as well as a great scientific explorer, the author of many learned books and articles. The plans he unfolded to me were ambitious: first and foremost the climbing of the mountain; side by side, an elaborate program of geographical, geological, geophysical and ethnic research in the vast wilderness of giant peaks and mighty glaciers around and on the way to K2. Nineteen scientists and crack Alpine guides, with fifteen tons of the best equipment and supplies that money could buy, would come from Europe. Hundreds of porters and helpers with additional food and equipment would be arranged in Pakistan. All in all, it would be the biggest expedition of its kind.

Desio was well qualified for his great task. He had been on a dozen expeditions, some in high mountains, others in wild deserts. He was a tough bundle of concentrated energy, short in height, neatly slim, with large round eyes, broad forehead, prominent hooked nose and a shock of silver-streaked golden hair. Alternately he was two personalities: now the cool calculating scientist, methodical, patient, precise, careful of the smallest detail; now the intensely human man of action, freely indulging his moods in colorful speech and vigorous gesture.

Like the friendship that developed between us, his many friendships were loyal and deep. His few enmities were implacable and bitter. He was unusually kind, but he could be ruthless when he thought it necessary.

After a quick reconnaissance of the K2 area, Desio went back to Italy to select his team and to equip and train them. I busied myself with local arrangements. The Hunza porters had played only a minor role with Houston; Desio's plans would take them to the highest camps. The mir of Hunza helped me to select ten of them with special care. Among them were some, like Vilayati, who had been with me on K2. Others had done well with the successful German expedition to Nanga Parbat. The actual performance of some of the Hunzas was disappointing, but most of them gave a splendid account of themselves.

By the middle of April, 1954, the new expedition and its supplies were assembled in Rawalpindi. There was a frustrating delay when bad weather stopped all flights on the hazardous air route to Skardu for ten days. But the enforced idleness enabled me to become friends with my new companions and improve my elementary knowledge of Italian.

Eventually the clouds cleared, and we flew into Skardu in beautiful sunny weather. No one can fly so close to mountains like Nanga Parbat and Haramosh without being deeply moved by changing emotions: joy at the loveliness of the scene, exultation in soaring effortlessly at such heights, humility at man's insignificance compared to the awesome grandeur of the mountain, a purifying feeling of unusual nearness to God.

In two hectic days in Skardu I selected the five hundred coolies who would carry the expedition's baggage to base camp. They were organized into three manageable groups that would march at one day's interval. Then, while Desio made a reconnaissance flight around K2 in a chartered plane, I rushed to Ashkole. There was much to be done there: buying the large quantity of flour that the coolies would need for the journey to base camp

and back; recruiting two hundred more coolies to carry this flour; more flour for the flour carriers: arrangements to strengthen and maintain the rope bridges for the unprecedented traffic; a schedule for the mail runners.

We left Ashkole in confident mood. Two days later we were on the Baltoro, strung out for miles in a long sinuous column which laboriously climbed up and down the crests and troughs of the mighty waves of black ice laid over with huge boulders. The boxes and bundles carried by the panting coolies were of many colors. We were using an elaborate color and number code, and a large mimeographed catalog listing the whereabouts of each of our ten thousand items of baggage. We could, for example, immediately tell apart the ordinary food for the approach march from the special food for the high camps. An elaborate system was necessary for our undertaking, which in Desio's words was a "heavy expedition."

Houston's, in contrast, had been a "light expedition": a small, well-knit group of determined, dedicated men, mostly carrying their own loads, doing without such aids as oxygen, climbing day after day to the limit of their endurance. The unrelenting laws of physiology do not permit such a pace beyond seven or eight weeks; just time enough if luck with the weather and other hazards remains normal, especially when the high camps are reached. The light expedition relies on speed, mobility and the exploitation of every chance and each sunny moment. It is a daring raid, an attempt to rush the defenses of the mountain. It may reach the summit or it may not, but in the really important sense this will make no difference. It will achieve resounding fame if it succeeds; everlasting glory if it fails.

But Desio was not leading a raid; he was mounting a siege. His efforts would not end with one or two summit bids in quick succession. He could be driven back many times, and return to the assault with fresh relays from his large team. He

would move up the mountain with method and without hurry. To insure safety in bad weather, there would be miles of fixed rope and pitons and many well-stocked permanent camps along the Abruzzi ridge. A mechanized winch would haul supplies up the long, steep snow slopes from Camp 2 to Camp 4. He had food sufficient to last the entire summer and well into the autumn.

By the ninth of May we were past the ugly snout of the Baltoro. Against the bleak background of glacier and lofty mountains, our straggling, weary caravan of seven hundred coolies was plodding onward with grim determination. Notwithstanding the rising altitude and some menacing clouds overhead, the unending line of colorful boxes and bundles was a satisfying sight. "Very reassuring," I said to one of my panting companions. "Yes," he replied. "We have enough and to spare of everything needed for success. Everything that money or human ingenuity can provide." "If only the weather will be kind" was my silent, prayerful thought.

That prayer was sorely needed, for an hour later we were struck by a blizzard. No expedition provides complete winter outfits or carries tents for all its coolies on the approach march. They must rely on native toughness, homespun clothes and such rock and ice caves as exist naturally along the route. The blizzard increased in ferocity. The chilling wind swept by in a mournful, low-pitched dirge which filled all earth and sky. As things became unbearable, the coolies dropped their loads, and seeking the shelter of the nearest large boulders, sat down in listless huddles in hope of mutual warmth.

Some hours later the wind slackened. By a combination of cajolery and threats, we made the coolies resume their march. There were many such interruptions in the next two days, but somehow we kept our cohesion and continued our fitful progress. A few of the coolies deserted and returned to Ashkole.

At last the wind stopped, to be followed by a period of heavy

snowfall. This we were able to sit out in Urdukass, a place with abundant natural shelter. We took stock of our situation and reorganized our baggage. After the snow came a cloudless, sunny day, and in a new burst of confidence we moved out of Urdukass for Concordia. Immediately we were in fresh trouble.

It is vain to look for certainty in human affairs, for at the unpredictable crucial moment something trivial may upset the best-laid plan. That is what happened to us now. Somewhere in our baggage there should have been enough snow goggles for the coolies in our caravan. These were indispensable on the dazzling white snow field which surrounded us in all directions. But somehow the snow glasses had got lost. They were not in their proper box. Perhaps they had been improperly catalogued. Then someone remembered seeing them in another box in Skardu, but that box was missing. Perhaps the coolie carrying it had deserted, and the precious load now lay buried under snow in the lee of some boulder.

We opened box after box in fruitless search, but it was imperative to continue the onward march. Otherwise we would run out of our carefully rationed flour. Many of the coolies staggered on with improvised eyeshades. A few lucky ones had kept dark glasses from some previous expedition, and they helped by leading their stumbling comrades who could not keep their eyes open. There were many desertions.

Eventually a dwindled caravan reached Concordia. Exhausted by the grim effort, numbed by the icy cold, burned and blinded by the snow, all the coolies dumped their loads with an air of complete finality. We were now only one day's march from base camp, and conscious of my great responsibility to Desio, I begged them to take us there. They refused, and for very good reason. They were in a pathetic condition. Their constantly watery eyes, bloodshot, swollen, obviously painful, could suffer permanent damage in one more day. I had continuously worn my snow glasses, yet my own eyes were watering and heavy.

The coolies turned their backs, and shouting and yelling in a mixture of pain, defiance and anger, they were gone. I retired into my tent, sad, but not without a sense of relief. For long into the night I continued to pray anxiously that everyone might reach Ashkole safely.

Desio and I awoke early next morning. Our baggage, scattered around in confusion in the vast Concordia amphitheater, made an oppressive and a lonely sight. But the clear cloudless dawn was the most beautiful I had ever seen. My spirits rose as I saw the gold-red shafts of sunshine alight on one giant peak after another. K2 looked serene, benevolent and near. It seemed that I could stretch out my hand and touch it.

We dispatched messengers to Ashkole and Skardu with requests to officials and friends for a fresh contingent of coolies. We comforted ourselves with the thought that they might already be on the way: for, based on accounts given in self-justification by the early deserters, ominous reports about our plight were being broadcast in Karachi and London radio news bulletins.

Desio and I, accompanied by a few Hunzas and carrying light loads, then marched up to the foot of K2. It was a weary day and my eyes itched and watered all the time, but we got there by early afternoon. Desio selected a place not far from the base camp of Houston's expedition. I was flooded with many memories as I recognized here an empty soup tin, there the stump of a candle. They lay untouched where I had left them. We put our loads down. We kissed each other on the cheeks in silent congratulation. It was no more than a symbol, but we had established base camp. Quickly we returned to Concordia.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### *The Summit*

FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS we had good weather. We brought in the loads abandoned on the Baltoro, and carried more loads to base camp. Two climbers were moved there, and in a week they opened up a safe route through the ice fall to Camp 1. In due course sixty fresh coolies reached Concordia, and in ten days they relayed our baggage to base camp. Then, in a magnificent effort, they carried heavy loads to Camp 1 as well. This made up for all the earlier lost time.

Fixed ropes were soon in place up to Camps 2, 3 and 4. That part of the climb became safe enough even in bad weather. Later we would similarly make safe all of the Abruzzi ridge up to the shoulder of the big plateau. Now it was time to fix the winch and haul loads up the lower snow slopes. The mountain was well and truly besieged.

Base camp this year was a place of bustle and activity. Climbers and Hunzas went to the higher camps in turns, worked there a few days and came down for rest and a change. Daily schedules were heavy but not exhausting. In a commodious tent with tables and chairs, we ate meals together, played cards and otherwise amused ourselves. We could read and write in the evenings under bright lights from liquid propane gas. An excellent cook pandered to our wayward appetites, and rationed out hot water to keep our bodies and clothes clean.

Mountaineering was both livelihood and life's passion for most of my companions. This was now our constant subject of discussion and debate. I heard fascinating personal accounts



of historic first climbs on Alpine routes previously believed to be unscalable. They promised to take me over some of these routes when I visited Italy. This I would have to do, for I must join the national celebrations which would surely follow the successful conclusion of our expedition. They planned other first climbs for the future. I questioned them at length on advanced mountaineering techniques. They explained the theory and were always ready to give me practical lessons. This meant wonderful hair-raising scrambles over precipitous rock and ice slopes in the vicinity of base camp.

In spite of the language barrier, I was captivated by the human individualities of my new friends; the exuberant eagerness of young Walter Bonatti, the agile rhythm of Lino Lacedelli, the strong solid quietness of Mario Puchoz, the mercurial quickness of Sergio Viotto, the courteous charm of Ubaldo Rey, the sober optimism of Achille Compagnoni, the artistic talent of Mario Fantind, the sincere helpfulness of Pino Gallotti. Cirillo Floreanini and I were once together for three days, away from all the others, and though we could not converse freely, we never had a dull moment.

Our siege continued through alternating good and bad weather. The higher camps were mere eagle nests; one could never be comfortable there, but they were well-stocked, safe hide-outs even in a bad storm. The obvious difficulties and dangers all around inspired in everyone a healthy respect for the mountain. Great care is second nature to an Alpine guide, and Desio had given firm orders against taking avoidable risks. We were stunned and overwhelmed when, despite all care, one of us was unexpectedly snatched away by sudden death.

I had spent the twentieth of June between Camps 1 and 2. A large party was carrying loads to the snow platform, from where they would be hauled up by the winch. In the afternoon I had returned to base camp to report good progress to Desio. He

asked me to go back to camp the next morning with some Hunzas who had been having a rest.

As I came out of my tent for early breakfast, force of habit made me look up toward the summit. It was hidden by swirling low clouds; if they became worse, my trip would be off. Then I looked up the ice fall. To my surprise, a large ragged group was slowly descending. "Everyone is coming down," I shouted to Desio. He rushed out of his tent. We stood together, perplexed. They were only a short distance away, but it seemed ages before the first ones came in. "Puchoz is dead," they said.

Desio went pale, bowed his head, but said nothing. "It can't be true; surely not Puchoz," I said involuntarily, deeply agitated. Puchoz was our toughest member. He had been foremost in our minds for the final assault. Only the day before I had seen him carrying heavier loads than anyone else. I had commented on this to Rey, who was Puchoz's neighbor in their mountain village of Courmayeur. "Yes," Rey had said. "Puchoz is a legend with us. Last year we had a fatal mountain accident. The dead body had fallen on a difficult exposed ledge. Repeated attempts to reach it failed. Then Puchoz was called in. He climbed the ledge and carried the corpse down on his back."

Puchoz had felt unwell in the afternoon. He had immediately lain down in his tent and was seen by Guido Pagani, the expedition doctor, who was also at Camp 1. It seemed only a chill, but by evening it had become pneumonia. Antibiotics and oxygen were given freely. By midnight Puchoz was dead.

It had begun to snow. We filed into our mess tent and sat down in mournful silence. Hours passed. Then someone broke down in an hysterical outburst. "Puchoz was killed by a cold, with the doctor at his side," he shouted. "This is a dangerous mountain. It will kill more of us yet. I am through." This mood quickly infected some others. Desio listened in silent anguish. Here was a difficult test of his leadership. I prayed that he would surmount it with tact and firmness, and would win. That would

be our most fitting tribute to the dead comrade.

Puchoz's body had been left behind at Camp 1. It lay there during the next five days, while a bitter storm raged around base camp. When finally we went up to Camp 1, a large black raven that we had never seen before was sitting outside the tent. It followed us as we brought the body down the glacier on a sledge, constantly crowing a shrill ugly note that sent shivers down my spine. It followed us to the grave which we had prepared close to the monument raised the year before in Art Gilkey's memory. Here, for the second time, I went through a poignant and moving funeral service for a friend, killed in the struggle for K<sub>2</sub>.

Without the greatness of Desio's leadership, the expedition might now have disintegrated. But his unflinching determination quickly sent everyone back to the higher camps. Once again we made slow and fitful progress. But the weather was so often bad that a month later even Camp 6 had not been well stocked. A general weariness had also begun to set in.

Desio began to think of a long withdrawal to base camp and another assault in the autumn with fresh reinforcements from Italy. The outside world began to think that Desio's was now only a lone hope. From far-off United States, Houston wrote to me his plans for an attempt on K<sub>2</sub> in 1955. Would I join him again? he asked. Would I make suggestions based on my experiences with Desio?

I agreed to join Houston, and I sent him my suggestions, but before the mail runner could reach Skardu with my letter, in a brief period of good weather, the siege had given place to a raid, and the mountain had been successfully climbed. At 6:00 P.M. on July 31, 1954, Compagnoni and Lacedelli carried the silk flags of Italy and Pakistan to the summit of K<sub>2</sub>.

The clearing of the weather on July 28 had electrified the climbers at Camp 7. By evening they had set up an austerity Camp 8. Compagnoni and Lacedelli stayed there and became the

summit pair. The others dedicated themselves to the less glamorous and more exhausting task of keeping these two supported and supplied from below. This was no time for a painstaking preparation of the route with rope and piton. The rule of "safety first" had ceased to have any meaning. They risked falls. They took the risk of being benighted at altitudes where this could mean death. They toiled to their utmost, driving themselves with the thought that it was now or never. One cylinder of oxygen, one bag of rations could be the difference between success and failure.

The most serious sufferer was Mahdi, the most steadfast among our Hunza comrades. The performance that he and Bonatti put on is without parallel in mountaineering history. On July 30 they set off from Camp 7 in a party of five to carry supplies to Compagnoni and Lacedelli in Camp 9. The others fell off one by one, but the onset of night found these two still climbing. They arrived within shouting distance of their objective, but in the darkness, they could not possibly climb further and had to spend the night in a hole dug in the snow. The oxygen they had carried up enabled Lacedelli and Compagnoni to reach the summit. Hahdi was grievously frostbitten and lost all ten toes.

Thus at last did the curtain drop on the drama of K2. It had begun two generations ago, before Compagnoni and Lacedelli, who acted out its final scenes, had even been born. Their success was not a reward for their individual efforts, though these were deserving of the highest praise. Partners in the triumph were their comrades sustaining them from the precarious camps below. The honor belonged no less to those others who, on previous occasions, and coming from diverse lands, had struggled and suffered and died on this same mountain, for this same end.

Compagnoni and Lacedelli, weak, breathless and exhausted, retreated from the mountaintop almost as soon as they reached

it. In any material sense a brief visitation such as this could hardly be called a conquest. It was little more than a momentary gesture of defiance.

Some may ask, "What is the use of such futile gestures, the point of all this restless wandering? All this sacrifice of blood and treasure, all this travail and sorrow, to enable someone to reach a high peak! But what does he do when he attains the summit?"

These questions are only asked when one has ceased to live, except in an animal way. The most satisfying pleasures spring from the fulfillment of our inborn instincts; and the instinct to wander, and seek, and discover is the very essence of man's being. A ceaseless urge to probe himself and his surroundings is man's divine destiny. That destiny he must needs fulfill, by struggling to the distant poles, scaling the highest peaks, plunging into outer space. Therein lies his abiding glory. That is why ventures such as these are celebrated not only by the partaking few, but by an entire generation of men; every one of whom thereafter walks with a lighter step and holds his proud head instinctively a little higher.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### *A Rapturous Vision*

THE SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME at K2 marked the end of a delightful chapter in the book of my life. Soon afterward another memorable chapter also came to a close when my appointment in Azad Kashmir ran out its officially allotted term and I was retired from service. Life went into the melting pot, unexpectedly, for I had hoped to serve another eight years in higher ranks.

My pride was badly hurt, though there was the compensation that many in the army whom I hardly knew openly expressed their shocked surprise. My uniformly good service record was well known. I made a formal protest, and received the correct reply that government could give or refuse high rank as they pleased. Among the high officials on the selection board that had ruled against me were friends of long standing. I still retain and value their friendship. They could not have done me a deliberate injustice, but what led to their decision still remains a mystery.

I would get about a third of my salary as pension. Having begun afresh after the partition of India, our assets were meager. At my age it would be difficult to set up a practice, or find other equally good employment. Even if we adopted austere standards, how would we meet the expenses of the children's education, which would be at their highest in the years just ahead? My heart ached at the thought that the children might have to do without some of their necessities and many of their pleasures. I dreaded having to give Qamar the news. How would I console her?

I waited until the household had gone to bed and we were alone. She heard me out, calm, unruffled. She asked a few questions: How long could we stay in the army house in Rawalpindi? How much leave would I get? "We shall move to Lahore," she then announced. "I know of a house there that will be vacant in three months. It is next to the best schools and colleges." At the sound of her calm, matter-of-fact voice the sense of calamity left me. I was thrilled to discover this new Qamar, perplexed and pleased to find that in a real crisis she was the stronger of the two. "Often you dislike a thing," she said, quoting from the Qurān, "not knowing that it is for your good." She did not comfort me; she behaved as if no comforting were needed. "You have never hurt anyone," she said, "never wished anyone ill. God has always been kind to you, He will not forsake you now. Let us say a humble prayer that our future be made fuller than our past."

I had been dreading a sleepless night. Now I dropped my head on her bosom like a child, and with that prayer on my lips I soon fell asleep.

Qamar's prayer was prophetic, for our future was indeed to be fuller than our past, though in the many months that we still had to spend in Rawalpindi we were not to know that. The future was to bring more leisure, and from unexpected sources more money than we had ever wanted or hoped for before. I would go on journeys to Europe and America; make new friends and meet old ones of whom we had many round the world; receive warm hospitality from complete strangers who recognized me because they had seen a film or read a book about the much publicized K2 expeditions; climb in the Alps, Dolomites and elsewhere with famous mountaineers who behaved as if I was doing them a favor. I would stumble into a short and fascinating association with a Texan multimillionaire in an oil-prospecting venture. There would be an unsought but exciting interlude with American movies as an actor in Lowell

Thomas' Cinerama production *The Search for Paradise*. I would fulfill a childhood ambition: learn to fly in spite of my defective eyesight, and discover a new dimension of physical thrills in fast aerobatics. I would write a book for a well-known publisher. There would be many other joys never dreamed of before.

For Qamar there would be fruitful travels to the other end of the world; the chance to satisfy her inborn urge to study, which had lain dormant while the five children and I were growing up. She would earn three master's degrees; become one of the first scientific social workers in Pakistan; would be invited to join the faculty of the University of the Punjab. For the children, a change to the metropolitan institutions of Lahore would bring a new flowering of their talents, until our house would overflow with medals and cups and certificates for the distinctions they would earn at their studies and sports.

That these blessings would result from the early end of my service I could not then foresee, but in some ways life became richer at once. Through the earnestness of our prayers we came closer to God, and Qamar's trust and faith in me brought us together as nothing else could have ever done. Her mood infected the children, and our house took on a festive air. Our affairs at Rawalpindi were wound up in a joyful excitement. The farewell visits with numerous friends were pleasant and long-drawn-out. I felt inwardly uneasy, but for reasons known only to them, my friends and family had decided that I was at the threshold of a great new world, not at the untimely end of a cherished career.

In those last few months I traveled over Azad Kashmir and the Northern Area even more than before, and Qamar and the children often came along. Most of the mule tracks and footpaths of the earlier days were now wide enough for a jeep, though there were still thrills aplenty in the steep and hair-raising twists and turns. At place after place Maula Bux would



recall some incident of our earlier trips, and though his stories were familiar to the three elder boys, some were new to young Farid. We would stop and show him where we had lost clothes in the river, where I had carried the coffin of the dead tribesman, where I had spent the night with the calf's head. Our only daughter, Durre-Sameen, was more interested in her own doings than in mine. She insisted on stopping whenever we crossed a stream or a river to satisfy a compulsive urge that gave Qamar the creeps, but with which I could sympathize. Durre had to do what at her age I had also done to my heart's content. While Qamar watched with a pale face and a pounding heart, Durre would stand right at the frothing water's edge, and hurl stone after stone into the stream. Then she would bend over to touch the ice-cold current with her little fingers and gleefully announce her scientific conclusion, "This river is coming from our refrigerator."

There were idyllic spots in remote unspoiled valleys which in my previous travels I had often rushed through with unseeing eyes. Running through lush green forests were clear trout-filled streams, cascading over clean white stones; I knew these mostly as places to drink and wash. There were snow-clad mountain peaks of great height; they had mostly served as check points to read my maps. There was a rock-girdled blue lake whose mirror-still surface lay eleven thousand feet above sea level; I had hurried by it many times with only a casual glance.

But some magic of Qamar's now gave me new eyes. She fell in love with that high lake at first sight, and was as excited as a child when she heard a local legend that it was visited every full moon by a Caucasian fairy princess. Over a thousand years ago, the fairy had married a human prince in defiance of the laws of the gods, but in full knowledge of the price the gods would exact. After a month of bliss at the place of their choice the prince would die. In an eternal widowhood, the solace of the fairy would be a monthly pilgrimage to the scene of their

honeymoon. For this, they had chosen the shores of that lake as the most beautiful place on earth.

Not far away, on the edge of a spur with a long unobstructed view, was a solitary hut, where we found such cheerful welcome from an aged couple that we went back to it again and again. He was seventy, she was not much younger. Their hard rustic life had etched deep lines on their bronzed faces, and had given them an appearance of mellowed dignity and warm friendliness. They had been married fifty years, and their tender attachment to each other deserved to become a greater legend than the story of the fairy princess. Their self-contained life was austere and simple and serene, and there was a depth to their mutual devotion that was independent of time or place or circumstance.

Their presence gave the hut an atmosphere of peace, and I became particularly aware of it one autumn weekend when we were their guests. The sun had just set. Qamar and I were at our evening prayers side by side. Our brows were on the ground in humble prostration, on our lips were words to exalt and glorify the Lord. Suddenly I was lost in the thought of that happy couple. A devout prayer for their well-being stirred up from the depths of my heart, and it flowed on and on like a stream from a gushing spring. I was uplifted and cleansed; rested and soothed.

Then I must have fallen into a state of twilight between waking and sleeping, though I can vividly recall my surprise as I felt a velvet-soft robe being placed gently over Qamar and myself. First it was loose enough to envelop us both in comfort, then it began to shrink smaller and smaller; to press us hard and tight against each other. "A little more and it will hurt," I said to myself, but instead of pain I felt only a sublime calm. We were squeezed closer and closer into a delicate and pure intimacy of which I had no previous experience; and as the robe shrank further, I was soon able to feel its other side as if through Qamar's body. Then I felt afraid for her, knowing

how sensitive she is to bodily discomfort. "Qamar, this is not my doing," I wanted to tell her. But before I could utter any words she and I had become one, and there seemed no point in telling anything to myself. We had merged body and soul, we were separate persons no more.

When I returned to reality from that rapturous vision, my brow was still on the ground. Qamar was still at my side. I was still praying for that happy couple. My heart was joyfully aware that my prayers for them had brought divine blessings on Qamar and me as well. Some heavenly grace had planted the seeds of a sacred new love in our hearts. That love has grown and flowered and borne new fruit day after day.

















*(continued from front flap)*

ing exploits in all history [the 1953 American Expedition to K2 and the successful Italian ascent the following year]. . . . In this autobiography first we follow the adventures of a boy in The Land of the Five Rivers. Then we go with him as a medical student, in Lahore and in London. After some years as an officer in the Army of the British Raj, and after many adventures in Persia, Ata-Ullah takes us back to India for the rioting and bloodshed that came with the partition of Hindustan. . . .

"My picturesque friend from the Punjab, who has spent his life in many lands, was indeed fortunate in his choice for a father, a Punjabi graybeard who passed on to him much enlightenment concerning human experience, and at the same time briefed him concerning many mysteries of the universe. . . . Born a Mohammedan, Ata-Ullah learned to treat Hindus and Christians as brothers. He understands and respects both his neighbors in India and the Westerners beyond the seas. Possessing the wisdom of the East, he practices with skill the medical science of the West. His has indeed been a journey along the high road to understanding, and he tells us with compassion and intelligence of what he found along the way. The autobiography of Mohammad Ata-Ullah will, I believe, leave you with the feeling that you have made a fabulous journey in the company of a wise and witty Citizen of Two Worlds."

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